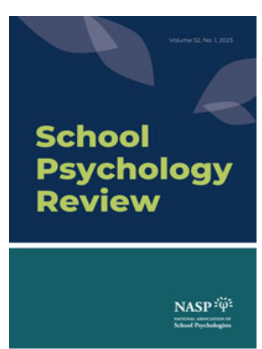

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SPECIAL SERIES

A Call for Equity-Focused Social-Emotional Learning

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ABSTRACT

The approaches we are using presently with social–emotional learning (SEL) curricula are not truly meeting the needs of our students. SEL programs have proven successful in many areas of mental and social wellbeing but fall short of their intended goals of promoting social warmth and human relationships. The literature suggests that minoritized students consistently report issues with perceptions of fit in the classroom environment, and these perceptions have known negative effects on academic and social outcomes. Current SEL curricula largely reflect White, middle class, American beliefs and values, perpetuating the negative social arrangements of disenfranchisement and marginalization. There is a significant need to reframe SEL curriculum development to remove this majority influence and encourage school stakeholders to challenge existing social inequities. SEL curricula have the potential to be key elements in creating more equitable school communities by more effectively addressing discrimination and prejudice through their frames of reference and the skills they help students and other stakeholders develop. Future research, actionable items and recommendations regarding how to adapt current SEL curricula are also discussed.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Current social–emotional learning (SEL) continues to perpetuate systems of oppression and fails to meet the needs of our minoritized student populations (Black/indigenous/people of color, LGBTQ+, dis/abled, immigrant, etc.). The school psychologist is integral in helping to facilitate the shift in the focus of SEL from "fixing" the deficits of individual students to focusing on the social contexts and social systems that affect the entire classroom, school, and community in order to more effectively meet the needs of minoritized student populations.

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Schools are one of the integral environments for students to learn varying socialization processes (Moore et al., 2019). Schools are teaching students not just the academic content they need to be successful, but the social and emotional content and skills they need as well. Unfortunately, some of those socialization processes that students learn within the school environment include discrimination and prejudice. Social–emotional learning (SEL) curriculums have been looked to as a potential solution not only for improving academic and behavioral outcomes for students, but also affecting healthy interpersonal relationships, social warmth and trust. However, these solutions have not been realized for minoritized students due to several inherent flaws in SEL curriculums being utilized today.

This paper will discuss how minoritized student populations are exposed to bias in the classroom and how our schools are reflective of and contributory to these societal norms. Understanding the mechanisms of how these biases are communicated to and experienced by students is necessary in exploring the potential causes of their perpetuation. We review how SEL curriculums are contributing to the implicit promotion of the majority perspective and fail to be inclusive of the experiences and perspectives of a wider student population and therefore cannot fully meet the needs of minoritized students or their majority peers. A reconceptualization of SEL curriculums is necessary if they are to achieve their intended goals for all students no matter their background. The role of the school psychologist in enacting and encouraging a reconceptualization of existing SEL curriculums is explored and actionable items and future topics for practice and research are suggested.

BIAS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

Many students attending U.S. public schools have experienced prejudice and discrimination based on their race and ethnicity (Benner, 2017; Grapin et al., 2019), gender identity (Cogburn et al., 2011), sexual orientation (Duke, 2011; Eisenberg et al., 2017), dis/ability (Espelage et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2011), language status (Chen et al., 2020; Dawson & Williams, 2008), immigration status (Guerra

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et al., 2019; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013), and/or religion affiliation (Dupper et al., 2015). Intersecting oppression may place students at higher risk for discrimination (Cogburn et al., 2011). As such, minoritized students may experience prejudice from peers, teachers, and others within school settings who come from dominant groups (Dovidio et al., 2010).

Schools are sociopolitical, influencing the practices, beliefs, knowledge, and discourse of those working within them (Milner, 2017). Whether held consciously, unconsciously, or dysconscious (unquestioned perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that justify and accept the inequitable status quo; King, 1991), colorblindness and postracialism ideologies influence how easily those within the educational environment (e.g., teachers, school support staff, administrators) are able to recognize institutional, systemic or personally mediated forms of bias that are at play within the school setting (Milner, 2015), including disproportionate discipline rates (Cheng, 2019) and academic achievement differences (Blake et al., 2011). Without acknowledging the larger societal processes around discrimination overtly or concertedly, schools tend to inadvertently align with and perpetuate them, curtailing any progress in allowing the under-recognized or under-defined brilliance of minoritized students to be realized and enhanced (Milner, 2015).

Broadly defined, social justice in the context of education "is about distributing resources fairly and treating all students equitably so that they feel safe and secure—physically and psychologically" (Álvarez, 2019). Because schools are an integral part of our social climate and serve to prepare students for life and the workforce, it's imperative that they understand the social, cultural, and economic inequalities that affect them and their peers.

As we know, school-based prejudice and discrimination has been linked to negative academic and mental health outcomes for youths (Benner & Graham, 2013; Grapin et al., 2019; Ülger et al., 2018). For example, discrimination among Black, Latinx, and immigrant-origin youths have been linked to increased externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Cooper et al., 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018; Tobler et al., 2013), depressive symptoms (Cooper et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2013; Tobler et al., 2013; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007), and academic difficulties (Cooper et al., 2013; Griffin et al., 2017). This large body of research indicates that there are serious negative effects of prejudice and discrimination that affect minoritized youths, and prejudice and discrimination in schools is pervasive and harmful to children's well-being and academic performance.

The classroom can provide students with social contexts that influence the possible *self* a student selects. Seemingly minor social nuances significantly affect the classroom environment and student learning and achievement (Anderson, 2009; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The classroom environment is impacted by bias due to social inequities from the teacher and other students. Through unconscious automaticity, biases are connected to neurological processes that regulate emotions that regard prejudice and are conditioned through cultural habituation (Abelson et al., 1998). This habituation makes it challenging for individuals to acknowledge they have biased attitudes and engage in discriminatory behavior (Sue, 2004). Due to the automaticity of bias, a targeted social change is needed. The social identity theory posits that we have a natural tendency to group people and compare those groups to one another (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The intergroup comparisons and perceptions of social change impact the identity an individual selects for themselves (Masinga & Dumont, 2017; Oysterman, 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). An individual's selected identity directly impacts their behavioral motivations. What identity an individual selects can be influenced by their perception of how a social change will affect their intergroup.

According to Masinga and Dumont (2017), increased student social awareness positively impacts participation in social change and increases their knowledge of the social comparisons they utilize. A student's social proficiencies and internal capabilities affect how well they engage in and support social change in their environments and their motivation to either achieve or avoid a possible *self* (Masinga & Dumont, 2017). Identity-based motivation theory postulates that an individual's motivations for actions are directly related to how the context of their environment impacts their perception of themselves, the identity they choose to express, and how they interpret the difficulties they experience (Oyserman, 2007; 2015). The social context is integral and impacts the possible identity that a student can select and the related behaviors that the student will express (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2015).

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

Social justice has become essential to school psychology education, practice, and training (Grapin & Shriberg, 2020; Graves et al., 2021; Shriberg & Clinton, 2016), and school psychologists are in a unique position to be change agents of social justice (Shriberg et al., 2013; Song et al., 2020). School psychologists can have a positive impact by applying social justice principles and human rights into their practice. Although the concept of social justice is not new, in 2017 the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) approved a formal definition of the term social justice:

> Social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth. (Adopted by the NASP Board of Directors, 2017)

The role of the school psychologist in advancing social justice is to empower students to not only understand the varying social inequities that are present in their larger society but to also empower them to challenge those inequities. The National Association of School Psychologists Standards 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 of the NASP Principles for Professional Ethics state that school psychologists must "…not engage in or condone actions or policies that discriminate against persons, including students and their families, other recipients of service, supervisees, and colleagues based on actual or perceived characteristics," but instead "…work to correct school practices that are unjustly discriminatory or that deny students or others their legal rights. School psychologists take steps to foster a school climate that is supportive, inclusive, safe, accepting, and respectful toward all persons, particularly those who have experienced marginalization in educational settings," (NASP, 2020, p. 44).

Over the last decade, the field has seen a significant increase in the volume of research around social justice and school psychology (e.g., Fisher, 2020; Malone & Proctor, 2019; Noltemeyer & Grapin, 2021; Shriberg & Clinton, 2016). Shriberg and colleagues (2011) conducted a Delphi study of 214 NASP members regarding (a) the definition of social justice, (b) the construct of social justice related to school psychology research, practice, and training, (c) the relevance of institutional power as a key topic area in school psychology and social justice, (d) knowledge and application of school psychologists to engage in applied social justice, and (e) barriers and supports related to promoting and implementing social justice in school psychology practices. Results indicated that respondents most strongly endorsed a definition of social justice centered on the idea of protecting the rights and opportunities for all. In terms of identifying important social justice topics, respondents indicated conducting culturally fair assessments and advocating for the rights of children and families are realistic actions to promote social justice. Additionally, Shriberg and colleagues (2011) found that younger professionals are more likely than older school psychologists to have had exposure to social justice topics in graduate school.

Given the relationship between culturally responsive practice and social justice (Shriberg et al., 2008), models of social justice training for school psychology emphasize institutional factors including a social justice mission statement, faculty commitment to advancing and integrating social justice research, and collaboration with schools and community (Moy et al., 2014), in addition to a commitment to recruiting and retaining minoritized students and faculty (Miranda et al., 2014). Grapin (2017) found that high-quality graduate programs emphasized social justice training by addressing multicultural topics in coursework and providing students with field-based training experiences. Each of these articles proposes a variety of different strategies for supporting school psychologists' commitment to social justice. For instance, Fisher (2020) indicates how cultural humility and social justice are related constructs. Cultural humility allows school psychologists to achieve a deeper understanding of diverse human experiences, which in turn enhances their practices in advocating for equity and culturally responsive practices in schools. Further, cultural humility focuses on developing characteristics that allow school psychologists to approach individuals and situations with awareness, to consider the multiple perspectives, and to advocate for systemic change (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Shriberg and Clinton (2016) emphasize that social justice involves taking action to ensure equitable access to services to individual and system levels.

SOCIAL POLITICS IN THE CLASSROOM

The classroom is composed of systems of meaning (Geertz, 1973) where relationships among parties are qualified through varying types of discourse (e.g., spoken, written, gestural, multimodal sign systems; Heath & Street, 2008). The classroom discourse and its implications on the relationships and interactions among educators, students and guardians within the classroom environment are affected by the participants' beliefs, knowledge histories, and worldview influences (Milner, 2017). In other words, the interactions that occur within the classroom and school environments are guided by and influenced by the social, cultural, economic, structural, and political conditions (Anyon, 2005; Payne, 2008).

According to ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), we as individuals exist within different layers of external environments. These layers range from interpersonal interactions with those in one's immediate environment (microsystems) to the implications broad societal attitudes and cultures have on one's experience (macrosystems). In

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this regard, classrooms and schools are microsystems, the immediate environments directly impacting a student's development; the societal issues of prejudice, equity, and discrimination (macrosystem), therefore, also manifest in schools and classrooms. That is, the larger society is reflected in the classroom experience, and the issues of the society, therefore, impact student outcomes.

In this vein, schools often promote and reproduce the wider social hierarchies defined by the ingroup/outgroup relations seen in the contexts of race, class, gender, and so on through discourse, allowing dominant groups to further and justify extant inequities (Goff et al., 2014; Salter & Adams, 2013). This is often accomplished through the prioritization of education that is culturally relevant to the White, middle-class, American point of view (Allen et al., 2013; Jagers et al., 2019) to the detriment of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The prioritization of this education imparts the knowledge, beliefs and worldviews that define the predominant philosophies of ingroup vs outgroup relations, inventing and reinforcing variations in expectations, thus promoting and propagating biases within the classroom settings (Allen et al., 2013; Goff et al., 2014; Salter & Adams, 2013). SEL curricula often follow this same model of prioritizing the majority history and experience.

The conscious and unconscious manners in which ingroup/outgroup social arrangements are expressed in schools are seen in the three curricula that all schools, at every level, teach to their students (Eisner, 2002): The explicit curriculum, defined as the specific academic goals of the institution, including teaching students to read, mathematically compute, and so on; implicit curriculum, the subtle messages that are embedded in the explicit curriculum that, in part, encode messages regarding student compliance and endorsed modes of behavior; and null curriculum, everything that is not taught in the school environment as it is not regarded as important enough to include within the educational setting (Eisner, 2002). It is through the implicit and null curricula that students learn the most about the social arrangements, and it is through the implicit and null curricula that biases are passed down and reinforced to our students and communities (Eisner, 2002).

A student's perception of classroom culture and climate impacts their ability to achieve in the classroom, as this perception influences their motivation and their attitudes toward engagement with learning (Ruzek & Schenke, 2019). A youth's perceptions of their sense of fit in the school or classroom environment impact their perceptions of their self-efficacy, academic ability, and academic achievement (Lewis & Hodges, 2015; Walton & Cohen, 2007). When we use a curriculum and fail to actively correct for potential bias of the majority focus, we should not be surprised if we contribute to negative perceptions of fit among minoritized students.

Because there is a social understanding that ethnic and racial prejudice is not acceptable (Crandall et al., 2002), and the same can be said for gender, religious and dis/ability discrimination, youth are capable of perceiving and accepting antiprejudice ideals and attempt to use them in their interactions with their peers (Thijs et al., 2016). Despite this, youth do not necessarily know how to fully integrate these understandings into their actions and their interactions with peers (Legault et al., 2007; Thijs et al., 2016). This gap in what youth perceive they are to do and what they do highlights the need for increasing their understanding and skills in this area. With the established successes of existing SEL curricula, integrating overt and mindful messaging and tools around bias, social justice and equity must be a priority in the development and reformation of SEL curricula.

THE GOALS OF SOCIAL–EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Social–emotional learning refers to the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to develop healthy identities, understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive personal goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2015). SEL promotes advancement of educational equity and achievement through authentic partnerships among the school, students, families, and community. Learning environments and experiences establishing trusting and collaborative relationships while delivering rigorous and meaningful curriculum/instruction is ideal.

The goals of SEL programs are to promote students' self-awareness and self-efficacy, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making skills, and to improve their attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). These create a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems and risk-taking behaviors, less emotional distress, and improved academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Sklad et al., 2012).

Previous research has shown that school-based SEL programs are associated with positive student outcomes in promoting social and emotional competencies. There have been four meta-analyses on the effectiveness of SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor

et al., 2017; Wigelsworth et al., 2016). Durlak et al. (2011) examined 213 school-based, universal SEL programs implemented with students from kindergarten through high school. Results demonstrated that students participating in SEL programs showed improvements in social–emotional skills, attitudes, utilization of positive social behavior, and academic performance. Taylor and colleagues (Taylor et al., 2017) reviewed 82 school-based, universal SEL interventions involving 97,406 students in kindergarten through high school. Results were similar to the Durlak et al. (2011) study and again indicated that, compared to those who didn't, students who received the SEL interventions improved their social–emotional skills, academic performance, and attitudes. Additionally, Taylor et al. (2017) demonstrated the positive long-term effects of SEL interventions with sustained improvements in well-being during follow-up periods that varied from 26 to 936 weeks for those who participated in the SEL intervention.

CRITICISM OF CURRENT SEL CURRICULUMS

Clearly, considerable research has suggested that school-based SEL interventions result in social and academic adjustment (Durlak et al., 2011, Jagers et al., 2019). Yet concerns have been raised as to whether SEL programs adequately reflect minoritized students (Jagers et al., 2019). Many available SEL programs may not adequately address the unique cultural identities held by minoritized students.

An important first step to correct the course of SEL is to be more cognizant of the historical frame of reference (White, middle-class, American) that traditional SEL was built around and how that framing impacts student expression of social and emotional skills within our schools and society (Hoffman, 2009). Current SEL programs have received much critique in the literature. Simmons (2019), for example, suggests that when focusing on race and racism, SEL can be seen as "White supremacy with a hug" (p. 31). That is to say that the ideals taught in SEL curriculums available to schools today can reinforce extant inequities by failing to address existing power differentials. The main focus of current SEL, some argue, is on increasing adult control over children through developing their compliant behavior and has become a way for students of color to be policed and penalized for being nonwhite, highlighting the need to develop supposedly needed skills to compensate (Simmons, 2019, 2021). This expectation for individual adaptation to majority expectation observed between White and students of color can also be seen between other ingroups/outgroups (e.g., gender conforming:nonconforming, straight:queer, able:dis/able, etc.). What is missing from SEL currently is an antioppressive and antiracist lens (Madda, 2019; Simmons, 2019).

A large factor in these perceptions may be that the evidence utilized to produce SEL curriculums is reliant on information that does not adequately represent students of diverse backgrounds (Rowe & Trickett, 2018). Lack of accurate reporting of participants' racial background could be another barrier to generalize current SEL research results to students of color. Furthermore, multiple researchers have emphasized the importance of drawing conclusions based strictly on identified samples of a study, advocating for explicitly outlining the populations and social contexts that study findings could generalize toward and avoiding the assumption that findings are universally applicable to all populations and subpopulations of students no matter their proportionality in the study group or the larger social contexts surrounding the particular study demographics (Kukull & Ganguli, 2012; Simons et al., 2017). Through an extensive meta-analysis, Rowe and Trickett (2018) revealed that the majority of SEL intervention research broadly reported race and ethnicity as White or Caucasian, Black or African American, and Latino or Hispanic. However, nearly half of the studies only utilized very broad racial categories such as *other*, *minority*, or *multiethnic* (Rowe & Trickett, 2018). This oversimplification and the ignorance of any within-group differences made it impossible to interpret or generalize any found results to students of color (Rowe & Trickett, 2018). Often, researchers mentioned that certain racial groups (e.g., Asian Americans, Indiginous population) are typically underrepresented in SEL intervention research (Garner et al., 2014; Rowe & Trickett, 2018), another barrier to generalization of the programs.

Rowe and Trickett reviewed and evaluated the generalizability of school-based universal SEL interventions among diverse populations of students from a variety of age groups using meta-analysis, looking at the following topics: reporting of demographic information, the use of the demographic information as moderators for SEL curriculum outcomes in study analyses, and how studies incorporated demographic information in their claims of effectiveness for different SEL interventions (Rowe & Trickett, 2018). In addition to the lack of reporting of racial background, Rowe and Trickett (2018) also found that other demographic information such as socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability status were also reported inconsistently among studies. Regarding the use of those diversity factors in analysis, the majority of the articles failed to include them in tests. For those who tested the moderating effects of those demographic variables, mixed and inconsistent findings were reported for students with diverse backgrounds.

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In other words, the effects of available SEL curriculums have been shown inconsistent among students with diverse identities in the areas of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status and disability. Furthermore, Rowe and Trickett (2018) also stated that oftentimes those moderation analyses were not well supported or justified by any existing theories or hypotheses.

More widely, psychoeducational behavioral intervention literature has consistently been done in a manner that does not reflect diverse students as Iwamasa et al. (2002) found only 14.4% of articles focused on Black participants and Delgado-Romero et al. (2005) found only 6.7% of participants in psychoeducational behavioral studies were Black across a 10-year period. As these examples illustrate, Black students are severely underrepresented in psychoeducational behavioral intervention research (Graves et al., 2021), and Rowe and Trickett (2018) further indicate that students of varying backgrounds beyond just Black are also severely underrepresented. As a result there is an observed trend in psychoeducational research to perpetuate a false sense of generalizability regarding the effectiveness of interventions on every student as student differences that affect their daily lives are minimized (Baldridge, 2014). This is done by endorsing the idea that issues are within the child individually and not within their school environment or larger society, as if an intervention that has been shown effective in one student group should work for all others no matter their backgrounds, cultural idiosyncrasies and lived circumstances (Graves et al., 2021). Further iterating the issues not only in the generalizability of the findings of SEL curriculums but also, further emphasizes how long standing this issue has been. Relatedly, SEL curriculums that are shown to be effective and widely used do not have the same outcomes for Black students. For example, *Strong Kids* which has been shown to be effective using mainly White study groups in improving social–emotional functioning was not found to be effective for Black children (Ryan et al., 2016). We expect SEL curriculums to be able to reach their intended goals with students who are not White, middle-class Christians living in the suburbs despite no evidence that this is true. This perpetuates systems of oppression and endorses to minoritized students that one's differences are not important and what works for one's White counterparts should work for them as well.

There is some evidence in the school-based intervention literature to suggest positive behavior changes when cultural modifications and adaptations are made (Graves et al., 2021). Adapting interventions that have been created with and normed with White children to be more culturally reflective of students of color can increase the effectiveness of those interventions with children of color (Graves et al., 2017; Castro-Olivio et al., 2018), particularly when it comes to recent curriculums that have been tailored to Black students (Aston et al., 2018; Graves & Aston, 2018; Jones et al., 2018).

However, the utilization of hyper-tailored curriculums such as *Sisters of Nia* for Black girls or *Brothers of Ujima* for Black boys is fundamentally flawed. In our opinion, increasing equity in the school community cannot be achieved unless everyone is learning together rather than separately about the impacts of racism and other forms of oppression. When we silo children into affinity groups (e.g., race, sexuality, gender), we are implicitly reaffirming the message that it is only with those that are similar to oneself that they can feel comfortable to be their authentic self. However, when we allow all children the opportunity to learn from each other about their varying experiences and backgrounds, we allow for them to more fully understand the social processes that lead to inequities and the role they play in perpetuating them. The antiracist and antioppressive lens needs to be applied to all SEL curriculums; doing so perpetuates the message to all children that their differences are not deficits since value is placed on the multitude of different backgrounds and lived experiences that impact students. It should be noted however, that as the development of SEL curriculums with an antiracist and anit-oppresive lens are yet to be developed, affinity groups will need to continue to be used as a tool help students unpack the effects of societal barriers and the biases that affect how they see themselves. The commonality of experience and safety of affinity groups provide students with a space that they can share and discuss these difficult topics and learn the social–emotional skills they will need. While affinity groups are a first step to addressing student needs, they should not be the only tool that is used.

A primary barrier in SEL curriculums reaching their intended goals is this lack of understanding of the lived experiences of students of varying backgrounds. SEL curriculums do not target how to work with feelings that are associated with prejudice and discrimination—experiences that a minoritized student may encounter—and are in need of an entirely different approach than teaching a student how to regulate their emotions. While one can teach students how to identify their feelings and use coping skills to calm down, failing to address the social process that led to the incident (i.e., prejudice) fails to adequately recognize the true impact of these occurrences. It is imperative to address the larger societal process that triggered the emotional response in a child to allow for the emotion to be processed rather than dealt with.

If a child does not have an understanding of how they can respond to prejudice or discrimination, let alone have

a space within their classrooms and schools to discuss these issues, being told to cope with their feeling will not be enough, and furthermore increases feelings of isolation and devaluation. Racism and all other forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, classim, homophobia) are held and maintained by societies; to combat them with an antiracist and antioppressive perspective, that perspective needs to be taught to all students, no matter their background. It is not just the minoritized students who would need and benefit from this antiracist and antioppressive lens on SEL, but their majority counterparts as well. For a minoritized student, what is taken from a lesson about emotional regulation that focuses not only on how to cope with one's emotions but also how to process and discuss the societal process that might have brought on that emotion is helpful in dealing with the emotional burden of being discriminated against; for majority students in that same classroom experiencing that same lesson, it allows for them to better understand how biases and stereotypes can affect others. If the lessons do not target the larger societal issues and do not directly discuss how biases and stereotypes impact behavior, the learning space that is being created is not facilitating student growth in their understanding of themselves and others.

We know that minoritized students are met with unjustified experiences of cultural mismatch, discrimination, microaggressions, and implicit biases in the school setting (Jagers et al., 2019). It may be that some SEL programs have the potential to be constructed in a way that is reflective of these biases and/or perpetuate their experiences of alienation, acculturative stress, stereotype threat, and disengagement. Jones et al. (2019) asserted that a research agenda for the next generation must emphasize the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in delivering SEL interventions, as well as embedding equity throughout SEL curriculums. While there are many proven benefits to SEL programs, they fall short of addressing the comprehensive emotional and mental health needs of our student population, particularly when it comes to minoritized students.

THREE TYPES OF SEL CURRICULA

As stated by Au et al. (2007), "Classrooms can be places of hope, where students and teachers gain glimpses of the kind of society we could live in where students learn the academic and critical skills needed to make it a reality" (p. x). SEL curriculums have enormous potential to not only promote student success, but also can be integral in helping create these classrooms (and communities) of hope. However, in order for SEL curricula to actually achieve this, educators and school psychologists must be aware of how to address and work around the entrenched systems of marginalization and endorsements of the implicit and null curricula (Soutter, 2019).

There are three different approaches in which SEL curricula work to address culture and equity: Personally responsible, participatory, and transformative (Jagers et al., 2019; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Personally responsible approaches to improve equity place the focus on promoting good character via individual utilization of prosocial attitudes and behaviors, believing that this will promote the common good. Participatory manners of addressing equity emphasize engaging in activities that increase awareness of others and their perspectives. Transformative approaches aim to improve equity by placing emphasis on changing institutions and systems in a way that better promotes equitable outcomes (Jagers et al., 2019; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Unfortunately, the personally responsible and participatory approaches promote the implicit and null curricula, as students are taught to conform and assimilate to the social arrangements rather than to critique and/or challenge the social arrangements (Jagers et al., 2019; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Participatory and personally responsible approaches can unwittingly indicate to students the superiority of the U.S. mainstream (White, middle-class) culture and require that students are compliant and subservient to the determined social system (Jagers et al., 2019). For example, SEL curricula promote that emotions are internal, individual states that should be actively managed and controlled to be directed in socially positive and healthy manners (Lakoff & Kovecses, 1987), and this can be accomplished through the utilization of verbalizations or visualization processes (CASEL, 2015). However, emotional regulation, experience and expression are highly conditioned by culture (Briggs, 1998; Chao, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1994), and not all cultures share the American, White, middle-class interpretation of emotional expression and how it should be regulated or expressed (Ballenger, 1992). Students are thus required to comply with and adopt manners of emotional expression and regulation that may not align with their own cultural understanding and interpretation of emotions. Also, within personally responsible and participatory approaches to SEL, there is a lack of student voice in the process that would allow for students to indicate how they or their family develop the social–emotional skill.

However, the transformative approach to SEL provides students with ways to critique the system and engage in social justice behaviors (Jagers et al., 2019). Transformative approaches provide students with learning opportunities to challenge and change the systems that create ingroups vs outgroups by teaching them to

strive to be self-determined to analyze and oppose the systems of disenfranchisement (Jagers et al., 2019), creating more lasting effects for students and the school and local communities. Through transformative approaches, the student voice is more highly intertwined in the process of social–emotional learning, allowing for student cultures and experiences to be more highly valued and accepted. Meaningful impacts through SEL, therefore, would be best accomplished when SEL curriculum utilizes, teaches, and centers on the transformative approach.

SHIFTING FROM AN INDIVIDUALISM PERSPECTIVE TO A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

The rhetoric of caring, community and democracy are heavily entrenched in social–emotional learning; however, when the focus is solely on skill development and measurement of that skill development, it is highly likely that the less quantifiable aspects of emotionality that exist essentially in social relationships may be neglected (Hoffman, 2009). In the short run, the focus on the individual and their utilization of a social–emotional skill might help to mitigate behaviors that may be causing classroom disruption as the student has learned to self-manage their behaviors. What is not addressed when focus is placed largely on skill acquisition and utilization is the larger issue of belonging and community in the classroom and school, as what is not discussed is how the student behavior that requires this self-management is a response to what occurs in the classroom (Hoffman, 2009; Lewis, 1995; Peak, 1991). Within our current system, a child's problem is defined as belonging entirely to that individual, failing to recognize that the behavior may be related to the individual not feeling attached to or a part of the school community. When viewed as an individual issue, an individual solution is required, which inadvertently continues to reinforce the separation of the individual from the group (Hoffman, 2009; Lewis, 1995; Peak, 1991). However, when an issue is viewed as a child needing more connection to the class and teacher, the approaches are focused on how to achieve that connection (Hoffman, 2009; Lewis, 1995; Peak, 1991).

To achieve the goals of transformative approaches to SEL, a shift to community focus (rather than individual focus) is necessary. Addressing the implications that complex emotional, interpersonal, and social interactional contexts have on behaviors is the focus of transformative approaches to SEL (Hoffman, 2009). This approach addresses the serious political and ethical consequences that come with defining SEL through a lens of individual competencies and deficits, by focusing on what can be done about the social contexts and social systems that are affecting the child. The deficits that are in turn highlighted are not within the child but within the environment itself (McDermott & Varenne, 2006). Transformative SEL thus focuses on how the attitudes and beliefs of the larger society (macrosystem) affect the classroom and school environment (microsystem) and influence student behaviors and interactions with peers. Focusing solely on the individual child and their behavior does not adequately allow for understanding and addressing the student's needs as it fails to recognize that the manner in which the student is traversing through the school environment is a reflection of how they have learned to gain access to safety, acceptance and resources due to the influence of the macrosystem. Similarly to the ecological perspective, transformative SEL is not focused on the deficits of the child but rather how the environment has influenced that child's development.

How, then, can we adapt current SEL curriculum that fails to fully address the above to make it more meaningful and impactful for all students? The answer is not a simple one but one that requires the efforts of more than the individual delivering the curriculum and must go beyond what is on the page. In order for SEL to have an antiracist and antioppressive lens, the lessons must promote cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and humility, cultural skill development, and culturally-responsive practices and actions. By including these four content areas, SEL is better able to be done and delivered in an equitable manner as well as provide a space for students of all ages to understand and discuss topics of discrimination and prejudice that may affect them or others in their classrooms/school. It is also imperative for these additions to be undertaken within an intersectional framework, as no student is defined and affected by just one social identifier or type of oppression; this also allows for multiple students to see themselves in the lessons and increases the generalizability of skills being taught.

Unfortunately, existing SEL lesson plans do not adequately address or provide an explanation of how to address cultural awareness, knowledge, skill development and actions. Existing SEL curricula do not utilize the entirety of tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy; whereas SEL currently does emphasize student learning and academic success, it fails to address the critical components of cultural competence (understanding of one's own culture and that of those around them, as well as positive cultural identity development) and sociopolitical consciousness (ability to recognize and critique social inequities; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy is a theoretical model for achieving student learning in a manner that endorses their cultural identities. The culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on developing

student critical perspectives that disrupt social inequities. This student development is done through curriculum content that allows students to learn in a manner that is relevant to them; through the curriculum, they must also be provided with opportunities to not only celebrate and appreciate their own culture but also gain knowledge of the culture of others. The learning opportunities the curriculum provides must also increase student awareness of the systems and structures that influence them and their peers (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The work of adapting SEL lessons to begin to address cultural awareness and so forth is not something that can be done in a quick manner and requires the entire school community to support and value these additions. Doing so requires outside information gathering and effort, but that extra effort allows for all students to feel seen and heard and allows students to gain an awareness of others as well.

METHODS FOR CHANGING SEL

School psychologists are uniquely positioned in schools to help encourage and facilitate these necessary changes in SEL because changes are needed not only to the curriculum itself but also the school system as a whole. School psychologists can utilize their expertise in both systems change and consultation to encourage and facilitate needed changes within the school to support the process of modifying and identifying curriculum and practices to best meet student needs. Additionally, they can support teachers with identifying how they can modify their existing SEL curriculums to better meet student needs.

One of the easiest ways to address these four areas is through pairing the SEL lessons with books that can bring about discussions of concepts of equity, social justice and diversity. Empirical literacy research has shown that benefits of reading go beyond what is expected (i.e., vocabulary, spelling, etc.) and can actually impact social competence by helping students' ability to understand and empathize with the emotions, thoughts and motivations of others (Adrián et al., 2005; Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Mar et al., 2010; Wulandini et al., 2018). These skills are certainly within the larger framework of social–emotional learning (Taylor et al., 2017). As Bishop (1990) said,

> "Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books." (p. ix)

Bishop (1990) highlights the need for books to represent children of all different types of backgrounds and books can help children to understand their connections to others and the multicultural nature of the world and can allow children of all differing backgrounds to see themselves and be exposed to those of whom they were unaware.

Reading fictional stories allows for a simulation of the experience of interacting with another person and successfully inferring what that other person is experiencing, as reading simulates a character's plans, inner thoughts, and feelings in response to their environment (Mar & Oatley, 2008). The ability to vicariously experience the life of the protagonist allows for student readers to expand and build upon varying experiences and the inner workings of other human characters (Kozak & Recchia, 2018). Reading affects social competence skill-building through the engaged reading process of making inferences; a reader is able to generate inferences about the character's mental states that impact their decisions, allowing them practice in this ability (Mar et al., 2011; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017). These benefits can be realized at every level of primary and secondary education.

It is key to find a book that provides a student with the opportunity to change their view of themself. Doing so requires identifying books where the characters experience one of the following: Make the world a better place, experience injustice, stand up or speak out, serve as a role model, take a risk, wrestle with right and wrong, and/or raise questions about their world (Johnson et al., 2017). Tips Johnson et al. (2017) and Coakley-Fields (2018) present to help facilitate using books to help obtain these outcomes are as follows: Know who is in your classroom (i.e., what are their interests, life experiences and challenges?); use books with characters who ignite student responses; group books thematically; use strategies that encourage reflection during and after reading (i.e., model and teach students to create text-to-self and text-to-life connections and disconnections); teach students that just as they read and interpret the stories in books, they are doing the same in social situations; and when students make a strong emotional connection, provide them with time to respond as well as an opportunity to take action (i.e., model and encourage connections between lessons taught with the book and students' real-life experiences and interactions). Utilizing reading and the read-aloud process allows for students within a classroom to have a common experience through the story and discursively respond to and connect with one another (Sipe, 2000; Sipe & McGuire, 2006;

Trelease, 2013), which thereby allows for the goal of inclusive classroom discourse and builds a community of care, equity and mitigation of exclusion (i.e., prejudice and discrimination; Naraian, 2017).

While integrating literature into SEL lessons can be a key tool, it is not a one-step solution, especially when it comes to minoritized students. When working with a group of elementary aged Black male students, Graves et al. (2017) culturally adapted the *Strong Start* social–emotional curriculum by modifying the books used to be more culturally relevant for Black males (i.e., books that contained Black main characters); they identified positive outcomes on student self-regulation and self-competence. This demonstrates that there are positive impacts when culturally adapting SEL curriculums. However, Graves et al. (2017) also indicated that even though the literature used were culturally adapted and were in line with the themes of the lessons being taught, the outcomes that were seen in White populations were not fully realized among the Black student sample as the intervention had no significant effect on student empathy, responsibility, or externalizing behaviors. Clearly, adjusting the literature selection to be reflective of the students is an important part of the equation, but it does not singlehandedly achieve the goals for transformative SEL (e.g., empowering students to recognize and understand the creation and impact of systemic disenfranchisement of minoritized groups and what they can do about it).

As with all interventions in the SEL arena, when pairing literature with SEL curriculums it is of utmost importance to ensure that discussion of social justice is co-occurring. Current SEL curriculums fail to meet the standards of transformative SEL because they do not address or provide explicit learning experiences that allow for children to understand the root causes for social inequities, foster self- and social awareness, and cultivate responsible individual and collective actions (Jagers et al., 2019). When using literature as a tool for transformative SEL, it is vital not only that books are carefully selected to represent many different backgrounds and perspectives, but also that instructors help their students connect what they are learning through the book and the SEL lesson to not only their own experiences but also to how these perspectives influence the world around them. Discussions of these connections allow for increased cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skill development. We should prompt students to think about how they can use the social competence skills learned through SEL lessons to prompt change within their communities. It is in these discussions and connections that the reality of transformative SEL takes hold. Clearly, it is important that SEL tools be culturally relevant for students, but it is equally as important (and perhaps more important) that educators facilitate meaningful discussion and connections between content, literature, and real-life. For a nonexhaustive list of books that can be used with SEL lessons for elementary, middle and high school students see the presented list by Johnson et al. (2017).

By no means are books the only conduits through which to accomplish the culturally relevant education practices that are central to transformative SEL. Other means of accomplishing transformative SEL as highlighted by Jagers et al. (2019) would be through student-centered/student-led approaches. These approaches focus on creating learning experiences for students that encourage collaborative problem solving. Jagers et al. (2019) highlight the use of project-based learning and youth participatory action research projects for cultivating positive outcomes for diverse students. In student-led approaches, students serve as the role of experts in their lived experiences and determine what expertise they have and how they can contribute to the collective problem-solving process; they work with and learn from one another (Jagers et al., 2019). Engaging in a student-led approach requires a high amount of planning on the part of the educator, but the resulting learning experience is more engaging and meaningful to students as it is based upon what the students have indicated is of interest to them. There are many ways to incorporate project-based learning into the classroom no matter the grade level nor content of focus. For example, fourth graders can learn more about natural resources and the environment as they work together to write letters to the city council regarding their city's recycling program and how they believe it can be improved. The key to project-based learning is that the issue of focus (which expands upon the classroom content the students are learning) must be driven by the students themselves. With social–emotional learning, project-based learning can, for example, be inspired by a book that was read in the classroom, with students discussing how they recognize similar situations within their communities or school, inspiring them to work together to formulate a solution to that situation. Project-based learning in SEL should rely on students to determine an appropriate approach to addressing the issue, and this can be done in a multitude of ways, including producing videos for other students, writing how-to guides for their peers, etc.

No matter the mechanism of transformative SEL, we must acknowledge the importance of moving from our current system of SEL that focuses on isolating and controlling individual behaviors and toward a more holistic, community-oriented focus. Transformative SEL aims to increase the understanding of how the default expectations of compliance with the majority perspective has resulted

in observed social inequities. Rather than rejecting the individual who fails to meet majority expectations, transformative SEL includes all students and helps to foster more communal understanding of our differences and how we can learn from and support one another. This change has the potential to greatly contribute to the improved mental and social health of our youth and society at large.

As the methods that are used for SEL are shifted to better meet student needs and interests, the lesson inherently becomes more generalizable. The students are more readily able not only to see themselves within the lesson, but also are more able to see their peers and their communities within these lessons. Generalizability of skills learned into the naturalistic settings of the classroom, school hallways, and outside of school locations is the goal. When SEL begins to use methods that are consciously focused on ensuring the experiences and perspectives of children are utilized, that increases the probability that the social and emotional skills that are being taught are going to make a lasting effect on the student in and out of the classroom.

As we move from traditional forms of SEL that focus on telling children how and what they should do, to incorporating them into the process of learning, it allows for them to form connections between what they learn and their own lives and the lives of others, but also form connections between what they learn and other academic subjects that are of interest to them, (i.e., social studies, civics, language arts, art) as many of our academic subjects have a human component to them that connects to the lived experience. The transformative approach may just be what was intended all along for social–emotional learning.

ADDRESSING THESE CHANGES AT THE SYSTEMS LEVEL

In order for the transformative approach and equity-focused SEL to be effective, all stakeholders within the school environment must be involved. If social–emotional learning is to move in this direction, it becomes imperative to understand how inequities within the school community are impacting students and their experiences. It is only once it is understood how children of varying backgrounds experience school, can we begin to shape a school community and environment that can support equity-focused SEL.

Each and every school stakeholder - school personnel, guardians, and students - has a role in creating a school environment where everyone feels safe to be themselves and fully engage in the learning environment, from academics to social. In order for the effects of an equity-focused social–emotional learning curriculum to be fully realized, it cannot just be the students who are learning more about themselves and others; this same learning has to be done with every stakeholder within the school community.

Inequities within schools are a community problem which everyone within that community has part in either maintaining or disrupting. For example, minoritzed students experience discrimination and microaggressions both in and out of the school setting, and the implications of those experiences can have lasting effects on the student through their thoughts and actions (Milner, 2018). The accumulation of these experiences, no matter where they take place, takes a toll on students, especially over time (McGee & Stovall, 2015). For example, students of color experiencing microaggressions due to race and racism may choose to disengage from the learning environment, either through decreasing participation in classroom discourse or subconsciously checking out of the learning concept completely (McGee & Stovall, 2015). Students of color may also experience racial battle fatigue, which refers to the psychological and mental health effects that result due to the persistent experiences of microaggressions (Smith et al., 2011). Racial battle fatigue typically results in the student becoming exhausted with having to figure out how to deal with the persistent experience of microaggressions (Martin, 2015).

Even if the most well researched and developed equity-focused social–emotional curriculum was used within the classroom, the experience or expectation of discrimination for students of color may remain high and negatively affect them academically, socially and emotionally, as the adults that are delivering the curriculum, the other adults within the school building and/or the guardians of their peers may be inadvertently negatively influencing their experience at school, making it an unsafe or unwelcoming space.

Largely, the interventions and frameworks that have been developed to help facilitate change in practices and behaviors that cause the opportunity gap for students of color, for example, focus on the personally-mediated racial bias of a teacher or school staff member. These models and interventions target racial bias by focusing on increasing understanding about the role of culture, its impacts on student development and classroom interactions, and using that gained understanding to promote student engagement and learning (Bottiani et al., 2017; Paris, 2012). Unfortunately, the models and interventions that are currently available have not been resoundingly effective. This lack of effectiveness is due in part to the lack of

rigorous testing of the interventions (Bottiani et al., 2017) and the slow uptake and creation of widely accepted, evidence-based strategies to promote a teacher's effective use of culturally responsive practices (Bottiani et al., 2012; Fiedler et al., 2008; Griner & Stewart, 2013).

It can also be argued that the lack of measured efficacy and effectiveness in the interventions that target personally-mediated bias (biases held by those in their environment concerning the characteristics that define them; Jones, 2000) is due to the lack of focus on other levels of racism that impact the school environment. Observed biased administrative and teaching practices and differential student outcomes can not be addressed by just concentrating on a single level of racism, especially since the addressed area of focus—personally-mediated racism—is less insidious than institutionalized racism (Mouzon & McLean, 2017; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). However, personally-mediated racism is a far more straightforward form of racism to intervene in than institutionalized racism (Williams & Mohammed, 2013), which can make it an appealing area of focus when attempting to close the opportunity gaps for students of color. But just because it is a reasonable approach does not mean it is the approach that will result in the most effective change in school environments, school staff behaviors, and student outcomes.

The interconnectedness of the various forms of racism illustrates how only addressing one area of racism will not fully address the issue that racism presents. The greater community implications of institutionalized racism affect not only the school environment, but also the teachers, guardians and students within the environment. The observed impacts that racism has on schools follows the tripartite model of racism (Jones, 2000), whereby the school policies, funding, and practices are impacted by institutionalized racism. Biased beliefs and resulting behaviors of guardians and school staff impact the degree to which a student will internalize racism; students within the school learn about and reflect personally mediated racism, while the students of color also internalize racialized beliefs about themselves.

This example is in regards to race, but students have a wide variety of varying identities that are influenced by these same three levels of bias – institutionalized, personally-mediated and internalized – due to the power, powerlessness and privilege that are associated with those varying identity characteristics. Regardless of the identity or background of the students, it is imperative for all school community members to be aware that their actions and behaviors influence the experience of students. In order for an equitable environment which provides the enrichment and warmth that would allow a student to develop as they would have if they did not feel the need to utilize an inauthentic self, one must provide interventions at all levels and have all of these interventions be interconnected across all stakeholders. This holistic approach is based upon the postulation that achieving equitable student mental health and educational outcomes is only attainable when the entire school community is a part of the process. When how one can define themselves is impacted by the social context, relationality, power and social justice (i.e., central foci of intersectionality) (Collins & Bilge, 2016), all stakeholders who are a part of maintaining those systems within the school environment are needed in the change process.

Within the school environment, increasing school stakeholder cultural humility and their ability to engage with each other in a culturally responsive way is integral to achieving the full benefits of an equity-focused social–emotional learning curriculum. To increase the cultural humility within the wide range of school stakeholders, the school itself must also work toward organizational cultural competence. The school environment influences the attitudes, values and behaviors toward increasing cultural humility within the school community members. The level of commitment the school stakeholders have toward engaging in culturally responsive actions is highly dependent upon the level of commitment the school has toward culturally responsive attitudes, behaviors, practices, staffing and policies. An equitable environment where an equity-focused SEL curriculum can thrive is created when it is clear that there is a high level of commitment toward organizational cultural competence (Cross et al., 1989). However, it should be noted that cultural humility and cultural responsivity are an ongoing process at both the individual stakeholder level and at the organizational school level because of the ever-changing demographics of the communities schools serve, the changing needs of the surrounding community and the changing and improving culturally responsive abilities of those within the school community. With these ever-changing factors, schools have to continually make adjustments to ensure that all stakeholder needs are being met in a culturally responsive manner (Cross et al., 1989; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

The "jumbled schoolhouse" phenomenon is when school personnel implement varying initiatives to address youth development but are doing so in an uncoordinated manner that leads to these varying initiatives to compete with one another (Elias et al., 2015). Just as the "jumbled schoolhouse" (Elias et al., 2015) phenomenon is a hurdle for schools trying to implement social action initiatives, the same can be experienced as schools are working to address equity within social–emotional learning. It is far more effective for schools to integrate programs than it is

for them to use discrete programs (Hale et al., 2014). As schools move to incorporate transformative SEL through either a newly develop curriculum or the utilization of culturally responsive modifications to SEL, they must also be cognizant of not only other programs and initiatives that the school is implementing regarding social justice curricula in differing academic areas as well as what other implementers of SEL are doing with the varying SEL curriculums that are being used in the classrooms, building-wide, etc. Implementing isolated social justice curricula in varying areas (i.e., academic and social–emotional) requires students to independently determine how to integrate these varying curricula and generalize it to their day-to-day life (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, 2009; Elias et al., 2015). An equity-focused SEL curriculum's effectiveness depends upon a systematic approach to address barriers that may influence its use. And such systemic approaches require change agents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

In order for school psychologists to be successful in implementing, advocating for and ensuring success of transformative SEL programs in their future schools, graduate training programs for school psychologists must provide graduate students with a well-developed understanding of social justice as both a process and a goal and provide students with the knowledge and skills required for the enactment of social justice. Courses must address not only the individual skills needed but also how to address systemic changes. In order for future school psychologists to be prepared to engage in supporting the use of transformative SEL in schools, they will need to be taught in a manner that not only concentrates on why it is important but also provides them with the foundation they need to enact the needed steps in the schools they will work within.

As with most culture shifts in education, a multidisciplinary approach is not only preferred, but required; all school personnel need to be aligned with the focus of transformative SEL if its implementation is to be successful. Delivering effective transformative SEL is dependent on implementing culturally relevant education, project-based learning and youth participatory research projects (as highlighted above) and doing so will require more time and planning than traditional, prepackaged manuals of lessons. This significant investment of time and effort must be undertaken to culturally adapt and/or develop student-led projects that relate to SEL topics. It is therefore necessary to also invest a significant amount of time and effort to cultivate a school climate that supports these efforts (e.g., creating a school culture that promotes antiracism and antioppression in all aspects of the school from teaching practices, discipline, relationships with families and the community that surrounds it).

The role of the school psychologist is paramount to achieving a school environment that can adequately and effectively support the delivery of transformative SEL. School psychologists, through their work and commitment to antiracism and antioppression, can and should promote the following: (a) evaluate the school's or district's current barriers to being able to promote and support transformative SEL; (b) work with a school or district to increase school personnel awareness of not only these barriers but also how their own biases impact and create these barriers; and (c) work with a school to develop the supportive culture and climate that is needed to support and enrich transformative SEL implementation. These tasks are immense undertakings and must be done by dedicated staff through system change efforts - it is unreasonable to assume these responsibilities can or will be accomplished by the individuals delivering the curriculum (i.e., teachers) and without conscientious leadership. While this may be a departure from typical workflows for the school psychologist, ultimately the school psychologist is best equipped for guiding and developing staff along this process of implementation, monitoring, and maintaining competence of those who deliver the curriculum, and ensuring the school environment is wholly supportive of the concepts and ideals of transformative SEL.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESEARCH

To date, no evidence-based SEL curriculums that support student social–emotional development by openly discussing issues of equity and discrimination exist (McCallops et al., 2019). There are also very few instances where we see the incorporation of culturally responsive practices as a part of the SEL curriculum examined for efficacy (Barnes, 2019). Current analyses and findings of SEL curriculum, both in its common forms and culturally adapted or modified, are riddled with a false sense of generalizability. It cannot be known how SEL affects student outcomes if identity characteristics and sociopolitical factors of the environment are not captured and taken into account during analysis and research design.

Future research that is aimed at determining if equity-focused SEL works must do it through an intersectional lens. Researchers must acknowledge and evaluate the simultaneous interactions between and among differing systems of oppression that students within the study sample are affected by and how that influences the outcome results. It is also through this acknowledgement

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and examination of the differing systems of oppression that affect students that a clear understanding of to whom the results generalize will be known. As students are cultural beings affected by their environments, it is also without question that results of a study of efficacy or effectiveness are also based in that cultural environment that students are within. Intersectional research using a mixed-method or multimethod approach would provide a better understanding of the efficacy and effectiveness of equity-focused SEL as outcome data from intersectional research studies attend to the context of the influence of the convergence of multiple forces of oppression on participants' experience or they provide an indication of the process by which participants navigate the confluence of forces of oppression (Chan et al., 2019). Future research evaluating SEL and equity-focused SEL should use multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data. These multiple sources of data should be selected as measures that will provide meaningful information regarding the influence of the linkage between social context and social identities on outcome data. Outcome data cannot be accurately disaggregated to reflect the complexity of social identity without the use of multimethod research approaches (Chan et al., 2019).

The development and testing of new curricula is not an expeditious process, and as they are being developed, it is unfortunate that students will continue to be educated with SEL curricula that are not meeting their needs. Therefore it is also of utmost importance to increase the research into how current SEL curricula can be adjusted to be more transformative and culturally responsive.

To address the limitations of existing SEL curriculums, curricula must be systematically developed through an iterative process. Researchers should utilize the Participatory Action Research (PAR) model outlined by Goldstein et al. (2012). The PAR approach enhances the quality of data collected as it focuses on research which intends to enable action. Therefore, PAR can be used in development projects to ensure the developed intervention meets the community's needs. The active participation of those within the community (e.g., school personnel, students, parents) allows for the developed products to better address the needs of those who would use them (e.g., teachers and students). Any effectiveness and reflectiveness of the developed products adequately addressing community needs are due to the emphasis of PAR to achieve empowerment of those involved. Developmental study designs should include a series of focus groups with school stakeholders in order to receive feedback on the developed materials. The first test of the developed curriculum should then be evaluated for feasibility, acceptability, utility and social validity at minimum. A final step of the developmental process should be a pilot test to evaluate the promise of the curriculum.

When developing content for curriculums, researchers should also be cognizant of the guiding principles of cultural relevance. For the content to be culturally relevant, the cultural context of the content must value and empower students; it must also be reflective of diverse voices and perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As curricula are developed utilizing the culturally responsive pedagogy theoretical model, it will also be better understood the influence developing student cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and culturally responsive skills and actions has on their social, emotional and academic outcomes.

As equity-focused SEL curricula are developed, they will not only need to be examined for efficacy of the curricula in ideal and controlled circumstances through randomized control trials, but the equity-focused SEL curricula will also need to be evaluated for effectiveness *in situ* as well. Intersectional empirical research methods should be used to examine both the efficacy and effectiveness of equity-focused SEL curricula. In doing so, research methods should not only be multimethod or mixed method but also utilize more intricate forms of statistical analysis, including structural equation modeling (SEM) and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). These more intricate forms of statistical analysis allow for the examination of individual, community and contextual factors, allowing the linkages between social context and social identifiers to be better captured and utilized to contextualize the outcome data collected (Chan & Erby, 2018).

The effectiveness of equity-focused SEL cannot be addressed without first determining ways to ensure buy-in from the varying school stakeholders, including students, school personnel, guardians and community members. In light of legislation and community debates concerning SEL and what it should and should not cover, determining what pre-implementation strategies are the most useful and for what group they are useful will be essential in creating safe and supportive school environments. Individual and systemic level implementation determinants have the potential of influencing the successful implementation of an equity-focused SEL. Pre-implementation strategies designed to target malleable implementation determinants may have positive effects on the fidelity of the implementation of the curriculum and determining the efficacy of the curriculum. Pre-implementation studies need to be done to evaluate how to improve the buy-in and success of equity-focused SEL. These pre-implementation strategies studies will need to be theory-driven and designed to target malleable determinants toward implementation (Lyon et al., 2019). These pre-implementation strategies will also need to be developed through the PAR approach,

as an implementation strategy must be designed in a manner that targets the identified determinant for implementation. By allowing the varying school stakeholders to inform the researcher of these determinants, it becomes clearer what behavioral change mechanisms are needed for varying school stakeholders.

And finally the examination of the sustainability of such an equity-focused SEL curriculum must be undertaken. This examination of sustainability must be done with varying school populations (e.g., urban/rural/suburban, heterogeneous/homogeneous student populations) as well as varying implentors and school organizational factors. If, for example, teacher perceptions and school-level variables (e.g., demographics, school organization health) were found to affect the implementation of one SEL intervention, the PAX Good Behavior Game (Domitrovich et al., 2015), it is imperative to also evaluate how stakeholders' individual factors and the contextual factors of the school influence the utilization of culturally responsive SEL curricula. Future research must evaluate implementation of SEL changes in regard to the following five key components of fidelity: (a) adherence, (b) dose, (c) quality of program delivery, (d) participant responsiveness, and (e) program differentiation (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Ensuring all these factors are examined, researchers can better identify barriers to implementation of and more strongly associate outcomes to changes made to SEL curricula.

Also highlighted is the need for enhanced training for those who deliver SEL curricula concerning how to not only appropriately deliver equity-focused SEL curricula, but also to better understand their own relationship with the social arrangements that maintain the systems of power and oppression. Institutionalized forms of bias cannot be addressed without first addressing the personally-mediated and internalized biases that an individual has that support and maintain those institutionalized biases. The school psychologist should focus on supporting staff in increasing their awareness of the effects of personally-mediated biases on their educational practices and provide them with strategies and tools to help them recognize and attenuate their own biases in their practices. But for this process to begin to take shape within a school environment, it requires the school psychologist to themselves engage in self-reflection; a school psychologist cannot be the agent of change within a school system and support the development of an equitable school environment if they themselves have not done the self-reflection that will be asked of other stakeholders. McCall and colleagues (2022) provide a detailed discussion of the self-critique process and systems change process for educators.

Further, it is imperative that an integrated approach is used when utilizing any type of antiracist or antioppressive curricula. The goal should be synergistic coordination between all personnel as to what is being taught and expected of students and how all personnel can support those learning targets throughout the school day (Elias, 2014). This synergistic coordination can only be accomplished through system consultation. In order for transformative SEL to be done in a sustainable manner that reaches its intended goals, school personnel – and school psychologists in particular – will need to determine the school and staff readiness for the implementation and utilization for equity focused SEL, and how it can be integrated with any other type of social–justice curriculum being used within the school. This system consultation will lead to the identification of the needs of the school system to best support transformative SEL (e.g., teacher training/support, district-wide effort/commitment, leadership team for implementing SEL in a school or district).

As the field evaluates the incorporation of culturally responsive modifications and newly developed equity-focused SEL curriculums, findings of this research can and should also be used to guide local, state and federal policies. It is only by thorough examination of these (and future) changes to SEL that the field can further educate school community members about the use of equity-focused SEL and how students are affected by these modifications or new curricula. No matter if it is a culturally responsive modification to SEL or a newly developed equity-focused SEL, it must be understood whether or not the target population and the school community stakeholders find the curriculum to be valuable or socially valid. Few studies of SEL curriculums evaluate social validity (Barnes, 2019), thus, it becomes even more important to evaluate social validity from all school community members when culturally responsive modifications or a newly developed equity-focused SEL curriculum are being used.

Legislatures within many states have already banned Critical Race Theory in public education or are in the process of doing so. Unfortunately, this movement often encompasses any and all discussions of equity, inclusion and diversity due to misconceptions about how these conversations and concepts affect student mental health and development. Social–emotional learning, especially transformative SEL, has a central focus on equity, inclusion, and diversity as a means to promote positive outcomes for students academically and social–emotionally. There is a significant need for school psychologists to be aware of not only how the policies at their local school may affect how they are able to promote transformative SEL and its equity focus within the school setting, but also what legislation and policies are either enacted or being proposed within their state. As a school psychologist, it is an ethical imperative that one works to remedy disparities and impede the dissemination of misinformation and misconceptions that may be damaging to the students within

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public education at the local, district and state levels. Through system consultation and an understanding of the social validity of transformative SEL, it will become clear what policies are needed within the school to support the implementation and sustainability of transformative SEL.

CONCLUSION

SEL curricula remain great vehicles to support student success and have the potential to create equitable school environments, but we must uncouple SEL curricula from White, American, middle-class values and beliefs if we are to ensure they do so for all students, especially minoritized students. There has been a call for over a decade to examine the sustainability of SEL programs, policies, and community partnerships (Greenberg, 2004), and yet there remains a large need in this area, especially when it comes to culturally responsive SEL and moving it from research to practice (Barnes, 2019). Our SEL curricula are inadvertently a part of the institutional forms of discrimination through promoting the social arrangements and belief systems that sustain them. Students have been underserved through our current systems of social–emotional learning. Making modifications to current curricula and shifting the emphasis of SEL to no longer promoting and maintaining systems of oppression can allow SEL curricula to better reach their intended goals.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

Chynna S. McCall earned her PhD in School Psychology from the University of Northern Colorado. She has been a School Psychologist in Colorado working with preschool-12th grade students. During her time in Colorado, she worked on improving school climates to help promote student identity development through school level consultation, consultation with teachers, and individual and small groups with students. Her research focuses on the creation of a school environment that facilitates prosocial student identity development. Her work investigates the influence the school environment has on a student’s identity development, identify expression (e.g., racial identity, gender identity, sexuality, and intersectionality), and internal and external behaviors. Her examination of this area also emphasizes the affect implicit bias and the resulting stereotyping behavior (by school staff and faculty as well as other students) has on a student’s identity development and resulting internal and external behaviors. The focus of Chynna’s work during her IES Postdoctoral Fellowship with the Missouri Prevention Science Institute at the University of Missouri has been focused on understanding the how the relationship between the student, teacher and the school environment impacts the observed academic achievement gap, and the perceptions students have of themselves as students. She was recently funded to develop, and pilot test an Equity-Focused Social Emotional Learning curriculum for 3–5th grade students.

Monica E. Romero is a doctoral student in School Psychology at the University of Missouri. She is from Los Angeles, CA, and received her undergraduate degree in psychology and sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include early identification and intervention/assessments for Emerging Bilinguals, Latinx, and undocumented immigrant youths with academic difficulties, language development, bilingual school psychology training and practice, and family-school partnerships.

Wenxi Yang is a doctoral student in School Psychology at the University of Missouri. She received her Bachelor’s degree in Business Management from Missouri State University with a minor in Psychology and her Master of Science degree in Psychology from Arizona State University. While at ASU she worked at the Statistics and Methods Lab for two years. Wenxi has a strong interest in (1) social-emotional development in children, and how stress and resilience influence those processes; (2) how personality traits and interpersonal beliefs (e.g., culture, attitudes) interact with external environments (e.g.,

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school, family) in affecting adjustment outcomes; and (3) how to apply these previous research interests to establish effective interventions and prevention.

Tanya Wiegland is a first-year doctoral student in Social work at the University of Missouri and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She received her BSW from Columbia College-Columbia and her MSW from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She has previously worked as a Therapist in her own private practice, Social Worker/Teacher in a local high school, Regional Director of Addiction Recovery, Case Management Supervisor in the child welfare system, and at a Child Advocacy Center/Emergency Shelter. Her research interests include children and families, creating trauma-informed environments, school-based interventions, crisis mediation, emotional intelligence and resiliency.