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## A Biblioguidance Approach to Understanding and Developing Adolescents' Social-Emotional Competence in the Health Education Classroom: A Formative Research Study

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Health Education



**A Biblioguidance Approach to Understanding and Developing Adolescents' Social-Emotional Competence in the Health Education Classroom: A Formative Research Study**

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## **A Biblioguidance Approach to Understanding and Developing Adolescents' Social-Emotional Competence in the Health Education Classroom: A Formative Research Study**

### **Abstract**

Purpose - Though the benefits of social-emotional competence (SEC) are well-recognized, measuring it and designing appropriately matched interventions remains elusive and methodologically challenging. This paper shares formative research designed to uncover the SEC of one secondary school health teacher's students and to help her make evidence-based curricular and instructional decisions.

Design/methodology/approach – Inspired by biblioguidance (or bibliotherapeutic) approaches to wellbeing, the researchers and teacher developed a fiction literature curriculum intended to foster SEC and health literacy skills. A mixed-method approach was used to gather and analyze data from 133 students and the teacher. A survey and journal entries embedded into the curriculum, and an interview were the sources.

Findings - Results indicate the curriculum paired well with national standards for health education and a respected SEC framework; it also served well as a vehicle to reveal students' SEC. Students appeared to be competent in some areas and less in others, and there were differences between self-assessed and expressed competence.

Practical implications – Biblioguidance approaches to developing SEC in health education and other classrooms are worth continued investigation. The current results will be used to revise the curriculum and to develop supplemental materials.

Originality/Value - In sharing the processes and findings, the authors hope teachers seeking to foster their students' SEC will replicate this work. Further, they hope health educators will gain recognition as the ideal professionals to deliver social-emotional learning instruction in schools.

1  
2  
3 Keywords – school health promotion, social-emotional health, curriculum development, action  
4  
5 research, school health promotion, school mental health, teachers, adolescents  
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7  
8 Paper type – Research paper  
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## 10 11 12 **Introduction** 13

14  
15 Social-emotional competence (SEC) is comprised of interpersonal and intrapersonal  
16  
17 competencies that manifest as patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors originating from  
18  
19 one's biological predisposition and environment (Assessment Work Group, 2019; Taylor *et al.*,  
20  
21 2018). The acquisition of SEC during childhood and adolescence is correlated positively with  
22  
23 academic performance, well-being, career, and life outcomes. This relationship holds true for  
24  
25 students from different economic backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and genders (Abrahams *et al.*,  
26  
27 2019; John and De Fruyt, 2015; Jones and Kahn, 2017).  
28  
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30  
31 Though the benefits SEC are well-recognized, measuring it and designing appropriately  
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33 matched interventions remains elusive and methodologically challenging. Shifting paradigms,  
34  
35 definitions, and frameworks, and the complexity of SEC due to its multiple contributors, are  
36  
37 cited as reasons for the difficulty in SEC research (Abrahams *et al.*, 2019; Marzano, 2015). In  
38  
39 this article we present formative research that evaluates a young adult, fiction literature  
40  
41 curriculum designed to foster and to measure SEC, while also developing health literacy skills, in  
42  
43 a secondary school health education teacher's classroom. We also explain how the results have  
44  
45 informed her future curricular decisions. By sharing our processes, findings, and implications,  
46  
47 we hope teachers seeking to foster the SEC among their students will benefit. Further, we hope  
48  
49 school professionals will recognize health education teachers as ideal SEC educators.  
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## 53 54 **Background** 55 56 57 58 59 60



1  
2  
3 empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible  
4  
5 decisions” (2015, p. 337). In the USA, health teachers receive training in each of these areas  
6  
7 (Society of Public Health Educators, 2019). Compared to other subject matter teachers, this  
8  
9 unique training prepares health teachers to play a substantial role in developing students’ SEC.

### 10 11 12 *Bibliotherapy/Biblioguidance: A Natural Fit to Fostering SEC*

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14  
15 Methodologically, bibliotherapy is a literature-based approach to social-emotional  
16  
17 learning. “The basic premise of bibliotherapy is that information, guidance, and solace can be  
18  
19 found through reading” (McNicol and Brewster, 2018, p. xiii). In bibliotherapy’s early days,  
20  
21 much focus was on self-help resources to address specific conditions among adults and primarily  
22  
23 took place in clinical settings. In recent decades, its use has expanded to include fiction and  
24  
25 poetry to improve mental health and wellbeing and in new settings, including schools.

26  
27  
28 In schools, bibliotherapy is sometimes referred to as biblioguidance (Gladding and  
29  
30 Gladding, 1991). Within this context, biblioguidance is a structured curriculum during which  
31  
32 students read selected books to identify with the characters and to observe how they transcend  
33  
34 challenges. The way characters handle different situations can afford insight and helps students  
35  
36 learn healthy ways to cope with difficult experiences (McPherson-Leitz, 2018; Rozalski *et al.*,  
37  
38 2010; Thibault, 2004). For example, after Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana in the USA, teachers  
39  
40 used a fiction literature curriculum to help students cope with anxiety, displacement, and loss and  
41  
42 to increase self-esteem, decrease levels of hopelessness, and improve academic engagement  
43  
44 (Stewart and Ames, 2014).

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49 In group settings, such as the classroom, reading shared literature also helps students to  
50  
51 connect with each other, to analyze their thoughts and behaviors. These outcomes, in addition to  
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53 those mentioned above, are central to SEL and support many of the NHES. Further, research  
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3 shows the best way to observe and understand students' SEC is in context and books can provide  
4 that context. (Abrahams *et al.*, 2019; Denham *et al.*, 2016). This factor, along with the other  
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7  
8 benefits, made the use of fiction literature an ideal fit for our project.  
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### 10 *The Role of Formative Research in Designing Relevant SEL Curriculum*

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12 To design relevant SEL curriculum, teachers need to be able to place learners along an  
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To design relevant SEL curriculum, teachers need to be able to place learners along an SEC continuum. Formative research is an ideal way to gain this insight. Formative research is “research conducted during the development of a program to help decide on and describe target audience, understand the factors which influence their behavior, and determine the best ways to reach them” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). In education, formative research is more commonly referred to as formative assessment and is defined as “a process used to guide, mentor, direct, and encourage student growth” (Tomlinson and Moon, 2013, p. 18).

There are two types of formative assessment, pre-assessment and on-going assessment. *Pre-assessment* can reveal students' interests, learning preferences, and existing knowledge and skills. Educators can use this data to determine learners' starting points in relation to a learning target and to guide curriculum and instructional decisions. *Ongoing* assessment allows educators to monitor knowledge and skills, providing a feedback loop for curricular and instructional modifications (Tomlinson and Moon, 2013). We regard both assessment types as essential to designing and fine-tuning an effective SEL curriculum.

### 44 *Formative Research Approach, Goals, and Questions*

For our project, we decided in-situ formative research was best. In-situ, or action research, means educational research jointly conducted by an educator and a researcher in a live instructional setting (Cobb *et al.*, 2003). In a live setting, we could build a self-assessment into the curriculum's introduction (i.e., pre-assessment) and gather data about students' SEC in

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2  
3 practice by way of strategically designed learning activities (i.e., ongoing assessment) throughout  
4 instruction. A pilot SEL curriculum could host these assessments and serve as a launching pad  
5  
6 for a more complete, refined curriculum. Figure 1 depicts our logic model.  
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9  
10 (Place Figure 1 about here)  
11

12 Our research goal was to establish an SEC learner audience profile that would inform one  
13 health teacher's SEL curricular decisions. Our research employed a mixed-method approach and  
14 included both pre- and ongoing formative assessment to answer these questions:  
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- 18 1. Does the pilot curriculum support both the NHES and CASEL framework?
- 19 2. To what extent is the pilot curriculum a vehicle for SEL?
- 20 3. What is the range of students' SEC?
- 21 4. Is students' self-assessed SEC similar to or discordant with their expressed SEC?
- 22 5. Based on the teacher's experience, what aspects of the curriculum were successful and  
23 what revisions are needed?  
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## 32 33 **Methods**

### 34 35 *The Curriculum*

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37 The pilot curriculum was 6-weeks long and overlaid an existing 10<sup>th</sup> grade mental and  
38 emotional health unit. The curriculum involved students reading young adult fiction literature  
39 from a curated selection and participating in activities intended to support SEC and health skills  
40 development. This curated collection included literature whose themes focused on identity,  
41 diversity, and/or social justice and whose characters' behaviors afforded discussions about  
42 NHES skills and CASEL framework competencies. We selected this literature from lists of  
43 books recommended by international organizations (e.g., the International Literacy Association)  
44 and local public libraries. With the assistance of the school librarian, we narrowed the choices on  
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3 the basis of reading level, content appropriateness, and availability to acquire copies at low or  
4 no-cost. Additionally, we informed the school counseling team about the curriculum in case any  
5 topics triggered students in a way that they might need support.  
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10 Over the six weeks, at staggered points of book completion, students journaled and  
11 participated in small-group discussions based on prompts aligned with the NHES and CASEL  
12 frameworks (see Appendix). Because being able to extract and analyze key ideas and details are  
13 literacy skills essential to *experiencing* literature, we phrased and sequenced the prompts to align  
14 with Wilhelm's 10 dimensions of reader response, which are organized into three groups:  
15 evocative, connective, and reflective. Per Wilhelm, these dimensions are transactions that occur  
16 when "expert" readers engage with text (Wilhelm, 2016). Without this engagement, it is difficult  
17 to elaborate, evaluate, and use text in meaningful ways.  
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### 28 *Setting and Participants*

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30 This study took place in five 10<sup>th</sup> grade health education classes taught by a secondary  
31 school health teacher in a small city outside of Chicago, Illinois in the USA. Data collection  
32 occurred in the fall 2019 semester. We chose to work with this teacher based on an existing  
33 research partnership, her willingness to engage, and the needs of her students. The Illinois Report  
34 Card website (2020) identified her school as underperforming. This means one or more student  
35 groups perform at or below all students in the lowest 5% of the state's schools. The school's  
36 graduation rate is 13% lower than the state average and chronic absenteeism is three times  
37 higher. Of the 4606 students, 59% are low income, 17% are English language learners, and 12%  
38 have special education plans (2019). Demographically, 80.2% identify as Latino/Hispanic,  
39 12.2% identify as Black, and the remaining identify as White, Asian, Pacific Islander, American  
40 Indian, other, or more than one race.  
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### *Informed consent*

Data collection activities were part of regular classroom instruction and were evaluated by the teacher for grading or participation points. Only data from students who gave written assent and whose parents provided consent was analyzed for research. Students did not know which classmates were participants and they were neither penalized nor rewarded for participating.

### *Instrumentation, Sampling, and Analysis*

Accurate assessment requires clearly defined constructs (Abrahams *et al.*, 2019). Our study used the clearly defined constructs of the CASEL framework as the basis for measurement, analysis, and recommendations. We selected complementary instruments based on their ability to relay self-assessed or expressed SEC and to reveal similarities and differences between and within the student population. By between, we mean how students differed from each other; by within, we mean how students' *self-assessed* SEC differed from their *expressed* SEC. For us, this required using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods so the strengths of one method would offset the limitations of the other. In this section, we describe each instrument, our sampling approach, and the method of analysis.

*Pilot Curriculum Matrix.* We aligned the pilot curriculum with the NHES and CASEL frameworks and Wilhelm's (2016) 10 dimensions of reader response (see Appendix). We used a three-phased approach to assure the matrix's validity and reliability. First, we independently reviewed and aligned the prompts which were written by the lead researcher and the teacher. Then, we discussed differences in interpretation, established agreement, and re-aligned the prompts. Later, when evaluating student responses journals, we became aware of additional interpretations. After discussion, we re-aligned the prompts again.

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3           *Self-Assessment.* As a pre-assessment to gain insight on students' existing SEC, we  
4 administered an online survey one week before the curriculum. This assessment included  
5 demographic questions and a self-assessment called the Social Skills Improvement System  
6 Social Emotional Learning Edition (SSIS-SEL) Student Form (Gresham and Elliott, 2008). The  
7 SSIS-SEL includes 46 behavior statements aligned with the CASEL framework. For each  
8 statement, students note agreement on a 4-point scale. Both composite (i.e., total) and  
9 competency-level scores can be calculated. This instrument has been validated and tested for  
10 reliability (Gresham *et al.*, 2018; Wilson-Ahlstrom *et al.*, 2011). Further, scale-based, self-  
11 assessments like the SSIS-SEL are regarded as important SEC data sources (Abrahams *et al.*,  
12 2019).

13  
14           To gather data, we employed non-probability, voluntary sampling. *Non-probability*  
15 sampling means we did not randomly select participants and/or their data. All students (n = 149)  
16 in the health teacher's five classes completed the survey; however, we only studied data of  
17 students who provided assent to and whose parents provided consent. Based on this requirement,  
18 we removed 12 students' surveys and an additional four that were partially complete. To protect  
19 the identity of the remaining 133 students, we removed their names from the self-assessments  
20 and applied codes. We applied the same code on their journal entries (described next) to match  
21 and compare data.

22  
23           To prepare the self-assessment for analysis, and as intended by the creators of the SSIS-  
24 SEL (Gresham and Elliott, 2008), we created variables representing the five CASEL framework  
25 areas. To do this, we used SPSS software to combine the item responses for each area. We also  
26 created a composite SEC variable. To study the range of students' SEC, we performed

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3 descriptive statistics. We later used a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to compare the self-assessment  
4 and journal entry results.  
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### 7 *Journal Entries*

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10 Journal entries served as a learning activity and an ongoing formative assessment tool.  
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12 The journal was a Google Doc pre-loaded with the prompts and electronically shared with the  
13 teacher. Students' responses to the prompts permitted us to evaluate whether the curriculum  
14 served as a vehicle for SEL, to describe the range of students' SEC, and to compare students'  
15 self-assessed versus expressed SEC. To evaluate the responses, we used the SSIS-SEL  
16 monitoring scales (Gresham and Elliott, 2008). Consisting of holistic rubrics aligned with the  
17 CASEL framework, these scales help to identify, describe, and differentiate students' SEC and to  
18 monitor progress. Because they were developed by the same researchers who developed the  
19 SSIS-SEL student form, there was consistency in construct definition. One key difference is the  
20 scales consist of five levels and the form responses are based on four levels. To facilitate  
21 comparison, we modified the scales such that the bottom level was zero and we regarded it as an  
22 absence of SEC performance. Then, we labeled the levels as follows: 4 = high, 3 = middle, 2  
23 and 1 = low.  
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40 To select journals for analysis, we employed a nested sampling approach that blended  
41 maximum variation and random sampling. In mixed-methods research, nested means the  
42 qualitative sample is selected from the larger quantitative sample (Fetters, 2020). In our study,  
43 we divided the 133 journals into three groups based on the journal author's overall SSIS-SEL  
44 score: high ( $\geq 3.25$ ), medium (2.75-3.24), and low ( $\leq 2.74$ ). These break-points were  
45 approximately 0.5 standard deviations above and below the mean. A visual inspection of the raw  
46 data and distribution curve shows these as natural breaks. Group-sizes were 30, 63, and 38,  
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3 respectively. From each group, we randomly selected 12 journals for a total of 36. This  
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5 maximum variation sampling approach ensured document diversity, assisted with initial pattern  
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7 identification, and supported qualitative and quantitative data combining.  
8  
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10 To assure coding reliability, we used a multi-phased, triangulation of analysis (Patton,  
11  
12 2015). In the first phase, we sought to establish a  $\geq 70$  kappa level to assure inter-rater reliability.  
13  
14 We did this using the testing center built into Dedoose, a data analysis software. Next, we set  
15  
16 coding rules: 1) code if an entry reflects one or more CASEL areas, and 2) rate the entry using  
17  
18 the modified SSIS-SEL monitoring scales. Then, we independently coded and rated the journals,  
19  
20 checked our inter-rater reliability, discussed differences, and continued to test until the requisite  
21  
22 kappa level was achieved. Once the requisite kappa level was achieved, we equally divided the  
23  
24 selected 36 journals and began coding. Upon completion, we used Dedoose to conduct  
25  
26 descriptive statistics and to extract excerpts representing each competency and at each level.  
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### 30 *Book Discussions*

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33 Like the journals, book discussions served as a learning activity and an ongoing  
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35 formative assessment tool. And also like the journals, they permitted us to evaluate whether the  
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37 curriculum served as a vehicle for SEL, to describe the range of students' SEC, and to compare  
38  
39 self-assessed versus expressed SEC. Data collection consisted of 15 small-group and five whole-  
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41 class discussion observations. During observations, we noted when a competency was expressed,  
42  
43 summarized that expression, and rated it using the modified SSIS-SEL monitoring scales. We  
44  
45 did not count every incidence of SEC expression as we aimed to obtain a holistic understanding  
46  
47 of the collective learner audiences' SEC.  
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51 Sampling was based on a simple rotation. On three small-group discussion days, we  
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53 observed a different group in each of the teacher's five classes. Groups consisted of 3-4 students  
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3 reading the same book and most classes had 6-8 groups. This means we did not observe all  
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5 groups. On the whole-class discussion day, we observed everyone.  
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7  
8 To analyze the observations, we reviewed each other's notes, discussed differences,  
9  
10 reached agreement, and made revisions. Next, the lead researcher created a summary inclusive of  
11  
12 representative excerpts for each competency and at each level. Then, the other researchers  
13  
14 reviewed her work, made suggestions, and created a final version. Having performed this task  
15  
16 after journal coding, we did not conduct another inter-rater reliability test  
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### 19 *Teacher Interview*

20  
21 The teacher interview took place after our initial data analysis. The researchers asked her  
22  
23 questions about students' SEC, the curriculum's alignment with the NHES and CASEL  
24  
25 frameworks, and the curricular revisions she thought to be necessary based on her experiences  
26  
27 and the findings. After the interview, the lead researcher summarized and interpreted the notes  
28  
29 and shared them with the teacher and other researchers for revisions and final approval. Not only  
30  
31 did the interview provide the researchers with another perspective, but it also served as a guided  
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33 reflection for the teacher. Reflective practice like this lies at the heart of formative research's  
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35 evaluation stage and feedback loop.  
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### 39 *Mixed-Method Analysis*

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41 At the beginning of this section, we indicated a benefit of mixed-method data collection  
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43 is the strengths of one method can offset the other's limitations. Also, a mixed-method *analysis*  
44  
45 is more comprehensive and possibly more accurate. This is because researchers match, compare,  
46  
47 and combine results, which can afford new insights and even create ambiguity. This ambiguity  
48  
49 prevents researchers from making definitive statements based on one type of data (Fetters, 2020).  
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52 Figure 2 reveals our mixed-method analysis approach.  
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(Place Figure 2 about here)

## Results

### *Demographics*

There were 133 student participants, aged 15- or 16-years old. Forty-six percent were female, 50% were male, and 4% preferred to not identify. Ethnically, 82% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 16% identified as not Hispanic, and 2% preferred to not identify.

### *RQ 1. Does the Pilot Curriculum Support both the NHES and CASEL framework?*

The Appendix shows the curriculum supported the NHES and CASEL frameworks. This was not surprising as we wrote the journal and discussion prompts with this intention. We will update the matrix in subsequent iterations of the curriculum.

### *RQ2. To What Extent Is the Pilot Curriculum a Vehicle for SEL?*

To determine the extent to which the curriculum was a vehicle for SEL, we consulted the matrix and the two ongoing formative assessments.

*Matrix.* The matrix shows the curriculum served as a vehicle for SEL, but served some competencies more than others. There were more opportunities for students to practice social awareness (n = 16), self-awareness (n = 9), and decision-making (n = 6) than relationship skills (n = 3) and self-management (n = 1). In large part, this is the “fault” of fiction literature. Relating to characters and reflecting on situations necessitates perspective-taking and acknowledging thoughts and emotions, which are skills inherent to self-awareness and social awareness. To be more balanced, supplemental learning activities should require practicing other competencies.

*Journals.* In their journals, students expressed some competencies more than others. Again, we anticipated this based on the matrix. We applied the social awareness code 57% of the time, which was more than the total codes applied percentage for the remaining

1  
2  
3 competencies. We applied the self-awareness, decision-making, self-management, and  
4  
5 relationship skills codes 22%, 9%, 9%, and 4% of the time, respectively.  
6

7  
8 *Book Discussions.* In their discussions, students more frequently expressed their social  
9  
10 awareness competency (in eight of the 20 observed discussions) compared to the others,  
11  
12 particularly self-management. This was not surprising given the journal findings; but, unlike the  
13  
14 journals, the discussions provided a different mechanism for SEC expression by way of student  
15  
16 interactions. For example, one student stated to another, “I like that you said, ‘How it is to us’ –  
17  
18 that was very deep.” This statement revealed his respect for others, which is inherent to social  
19  
20 awareness, and his communication skills, which is inherent to relationship skills. The discussions  
21  
22 also provided students with new insights. When discussing the prompt “What have you learned  
23  
24 about interpersonal communication?” one student said, “You can talk to people you feel  
25  
26 comfortable around, like when Quinn talks to Jill. He doesn’t feel comfortable talking to  
27  
28 others.” Another student said, “I learned it is important to speak up because it can positively  
29  
30 affect you, the community, and the world.” In both instances, the group members nodded their  
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32 heads in agreement and then shared *their* insights.  
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### 37 *RQ3. What Is the Range of Students’ SEC?*

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40 To determine the range of SEC, we consulted the pre- and ongoing formative  
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42 assessments.  
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44  
45 *Self-Assessment.* Self-assessed SEC varied broadly. Scores ranged from 1 to 4 on the 4-  
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47 point scale. Further, the overall distribution was not normal (i.e., non-parametric). For this  
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49 reason, we present mean and median scores (see Table 2). Both the means and medians indicate  
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51 students rated their self-awareness and social awareness as highest. The means show they rated  
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3 self-management as lowest; but the medians show they rated relationship skills as lowest. The  
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5 mean and median total SEC was similar, 2.93 and 2.95 respectively.  
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8 (Place Table 2 about here)  
9

10 *Journal Entries.* SEC expression varied broadly. Like the self-assessment, the  
11  
12 distribution was non-parametric. The means show self-awareness expression as highest (M =  
13  
14 2.46); the medians show self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making tied  
15  
16 for highest (Md = 2.50 each) (see Table 2). Both show self-management expression as lowest (M  
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18 = 1.93, Md = 2.0). The mean and median total SEC were similar, 2.40 and 2.47 respectively. For  
19  
20 examples of competency expression from high, middle, and low levels, see Table 3.  
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24 (Place Table 3 about here)  
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26 *Book discussions.* Our discussion notes indicate the majority of SEC expression fell into  
27  
28 the middle range (a rating of “3”). The highest ratings were applied to self-awareness and social  
29  
30 awareness, and the lowest to self-management and relationship skills. Below appear examples  
31  
32 from each level to help readers understand what these levels look like.  
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35 *High-level social awareness.* This excerpt came a small-group discussion about  
36  
37 *American Boys* by Brendan Kiely and Jason Reynolds. Rashad is an African-American  
38  
39 secondary school student falsely charged with shoplifting and pinned down by a police  
40  
41 officer. Quinn is a White secondary school student who observed the event. The prompt  
42  
43 was: *What do you think the main characters may be dealing with? What struggles might*  
44  
45 *they experience?*  
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48  
49 Student 1: Confusion probably. Shock. [The situation] happened so fast. They  
50  
51 needed to process it. It wasn't supposed to go down like that.  
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3 Student 2: Rashad was trying to tell his dad he didn't do it; but his dad was just  
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5 disappointed.

6  
7 Student 3: I think Rashad's angry at his dad. And Quinn, maybe he is angry with  
8  
9 himself.

10  
11 Student 3: My question is what if Rashad and Quinn were in each other's  
12  
13 situations? I feel Quinn wouldn't have been in that situation. I feel like he's really  
14  
15 scared. [Also,] seeing stuff is different than it happening to you no matter what  
16  
17 the situation. I feel Rashad's going to be very paranoid. That kind of stuff can  
18  
19 give you PTSD.

20  
21 Student 2: What do you mean Quinn wouldn't even be in that situation?

22  
23 Student 3: They're from different sides of the fence.

24  
25 We regard this dialogue as high-level because students demonstrated exceptional ability  
26  
27 to listen to each other's ideas and they consistently expressed empathy for others whose  
28  
29 cultures or backgrounds were different from their own.

30  
31 *Middle-level relationship skills.* This example comes from a small-group  
32  
33 discussion about *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin. The prompt was, "So far  
34  
35 what have you learned about interpersonal communication?" One student said, "Solo  
36  
37 should not have shunned Riley in the cafeteria; he should have advocated for him." We  
38  
39 regard this statement as middle-level because the student understood when to offer help,  
40  
41 but she did not offer a way to negotiate the conflict or manage the situation.

42  
43 *Low-level self-awareness.* This example comes from a small-group discussion  
44  
45 about the book *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. The prompt was, "Has the book  
46  
47 influenced what you believe in?"

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3 Student 1: I don't think so. We live in similar situations or backgrounds, so it  
4  
5 hasn't changed.  
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7  
8 Students 2, 3, and 4: No response  
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10 Another low-level example comes from the whole-class discussion for the prompt, "How  
11  
12 has reading the book you selected helped you understand yourself better?" One student  
13  
14 said, "For me no. I already know what can happen to me if I'm not careful." We rated the  
15  
16 latter and former responses as low-level because the students demonstrated limited  
17  
18 recognition of their emotions and/or limited ability to describe their feelings and  
19  
20 influences on their actions.  
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23  
24 *RQ4. Is Students' Self-Assessed SEC Similar to or Discordant with Their Expressed SEC?*  
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26 During our analysis, not only did we examine each set of results in its own right, but we  
27  
28 also combined and reviewed them to look for concordance, discordance, complementarity, and  
29  
30 expansion opportunities. This practice is a characteristic of mixed-method research.  
31  
32

33 We compared the SSIS-SEL scores of the 36 students whose journals we analyzed to the  
34  
35 ratings we applied to their journals. Due to the non-parametric nature of the data, we used the  
36  
37 Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test instead of a t-test. This test revealed a significant difference  
38  
39 between self-assessed and expressed total SEC;  $z = -3.566$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a medium effect size  
40  
41 (.42) (Cohen, 1988). The median *expressed* total SEC ( $Md = 2.46$ ) was much lower than the *self-*  
42  
43 *assessed* ( $Md = 3.17$ ). This significant difference also held true for each competency ( $p \leq .01$ ).  
44  
45 This discordance could mean students inflated their competency on the self-assessment or we  
46  
47 were more critical of their expressed competency in the journals. Another explanation could be  
48  
49 the instruments. The SSIS-SEL student form is a survey and SSIS-SEL monitoring scales are  
50  
51 rubrics. Though developed by the same research team, they might reveal different results. Or, the  
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3 difference could relate to the modifications we made to the scales. It is beyond the scope of this  
4  
5 article to explore these possibilities; however, we do recommend future research.  
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8 We did not compare the book discussion notes to either assessment because it was not  
9  
10 possible to identify the 36 students due to the deidentification steps taken. However, in  
11  
12 calculating an average total expressed SEC, the mean ( $M = 3.0$ ) was more similar to the self-  
13  
14 assessments ( $M = 2.93$ ) than the journals ( $M = 2.40$ ). This could mean students' self-assessed  
15  
16 and orally-expressed SEC are more closely aligned than their written-expressed SEC, a variation  
17  
18 that could be attributed to differences in written versus oral skills.  
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21 *RQ 5. Based on the teacher's experience, what aspects of the curriculum were successful and*  
22  
23 *what revisions are needed?*  
24  
25

26 The interview with the teacher revealed recommendations that we grouped into four  
27  
28 themes. First, recognize that some students might not be motivated to read a book. By way of an  
29  
30 informal survey, the teacher learned that many of her students did not enjoy reading. Giving  
31  
32 students choices on which books to read, starting off the project with book talks (a brief oral  
33  
34 preview of the book), having students discuss their books with classmates, and providing a  
35  
36 reading schedule were strategies she employed to motivate students and keep them on track.  
37  
38 Second, direct students with lower-level reading skills towards books matched to their ability.  
39  
40 We did not do this, but will next time. By consulting with school counselors or English language  
41  
42 arts teachers, we can identify these students. Graphic novels might be another option. Third, *do*  
43  
44 use fiction literature (or even mainstream movies) to provide context. The teacher found that  
45  
46 both she *and* the students continued to reference book characters and situations during and  
47  
48 outside of the curriculum unit. Students' life experiences vary; some will have experienced  
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50 events that others have not. Literature (or movies) can provide a point of reference. Fourth,  
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3 provide direct instruction on SEC. The teacher speculated some students might not have been  
4 familiar with some of the terminology or concepts in the assessments. Next time, she will begin  
5 the project with a CASEL framework overview and engage students in a discussion during which  
6 they must come up with examples for each framework area.  
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## 12 **Discussion**

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14 Formative research supports teachers in creating a learner audience profile to guide  
15 curricular and instructional decisions (Taylor *et al.*, 2018). In this section, we reflect on our  
16 results, acknowledge limitations, and offer suggestions for developing SEL curriculum.  
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### 20 *Does the Curriculum Support the NHES and CASEL?*

21  
22 It was clear the curriculum served as a vehicle for SEL and was aligned with the NHES.  
23  
24 The results indicate there were more frequent opportunities to practice social awareness and  
25 fewer opportunities to practice relationship skills and self-management. Future iterations should  
26 be more balanced. This can be achieved by way of supplemental learning activities catering to  
27 the competencies less frequently represented or by revising the prompts. Supplemental learning  
28 activities like role-plays and case studies could provide opportunities to practice decision-making  
29 and relationship skills. Behavior logs and personal reflections could develop self-awareness.  
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31 Self-studies focusing on goal-setting, conflict resolution, or stress management could develop  
32 students' self-management skills.  
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45 Despite the competency imbalance, we were pleased to see how the journals and  
46 discussions provided different venues for SEC expression. By nature, the journals allowed  
47 students time to reflect and to share thoughts privately; the discussions let students exchange  
48 ideas and practice SEC. In future iterations, we recommend teachers add online discussions.  
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3 These would students have time to reflect before responding, exposed them to others'  
4 perspectives, and provide opportunities to practice their SEC, particularly relationship skills.

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7 *What Was Students' SEC and Did Their Self-Assessed SEC Vary from Their Expressed?*

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10 Since we used the SSIS-SEL student form to evaluate *self-assessed* SEC and the SSIS-  
11 SEL monitoring scales to evaluate *expressed* SEC, we thought it would be best to reflect on the  
12 range of students' SEC and to compare results using the terminology of those instruments.

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17 Regarding similarities, students self-assessed and expressed moderate or high levels of  
18 social awareness and lower levels of self-management. Per the SSIS-SEL monitoring scales  
19 (Gresham and Elliott, 2008), a student with high or moderate social awareness competency can  
20 listen to how others feel and support their emotions. They also can demonstrate empathy for  
21 others, including those from different cultures or backgrounds. Students performing at these  
22 levels need minimal coaching to improve their skills. In contrast, students self-assessed *and*  
23 expressed moderately-low or low levels of self-management. Per the scales, someone with  
24 moderately-low or low-level self-management might have difficulty with motivation, setting and  
25 keeping goals, or staying calm when teased or disagreeing with others. Students at these levels  
26 need additional instruction to improve their competency.

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40 In contrast to the similarities found between self-assessed and expressed social awareness  
41 and self-management, discordances were found for relationship skills, self-awareness, and  
42 responsible decision-making. The SSIS-SEL student form results revealed decision-making as  
43 one of the highest and relationship skills as one of the lowest, whereas the journal analysis  
44 results indicated self-awareness as highest and self-management as lowest. This discordance  
45 might stem the following reasons: 1) the instruments were designed to measure the same  
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3 constructs, but in different ways; 2) there was an actual difference between self-assessed and  
4 expressed SEC. Both reasons, and the exploration of others, would be worthy of future research.  
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### 7 8 **Limitations**

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10 With any SEC assessment, there will always be some degree of uncertainty (Krachman *et*  
11 *al.*, 2016). Limitations to our research were site-specific or inherent to our instruments.  
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- 14  
15 1. Our participants attended a school identified as underperforming. It is possible poor  
16 literacy and writing skills impacted the data. It was evident in discussions that some  
17 students were behind in reading their books and it was apparent from journal entries that  
18 some students had poor writing skills. Further, some participants were English language  
19 learners and may have had difficulty with reading, writing, and orally expressing ideas.  
20 While we chose books with varying Lexile scores and wrote prompts with low-level  
21 readers in mind, some students still may have struggled.  
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- 24  
25 2. Our study focused on the experiences of one teacher and data collected from only her  
26 students. This prevents us from generalizing the results to other populations. However,  
27 our research was designed to support *this* teacher and *her* students' SEC.  
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- 30  
31 3. The SSIS-SEL monitoring scales were designed for researchers seeking to observe SEC-  
32 related behaviors. We used the scales to “observe” students’ “behavior” as written in their  
33 journals entries and these entries might not reflect their actual behaviors.  
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- 36  
37 4. The SSIS-SEL student form is a self-assessment. This leaves room for memory effects  
38 (i.e., respondents may not accurately recall actions) and social-desirability biases (i.e.,  
39 respondents may provide answers they think are “correct,” rather than their actual beliefs  
40 or actions).  
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5. There were 13 students who did not assent or whose parents did not consent to this study and their data was excluded. It is possible their data could have changed some results.

Despite these limitations, our assessments performed valuable functions. Our pre-assessment survey helped us to identify “where” students were along an SEC continuum and our ongoing assessments (the journal entries and book discussions) helped us to monitor students’ SEC knowledge and skills. Collectively, these assessments provided a feedback loop for curricular, instructional, *and* assessment modifications.

### **Implications and Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on our findings and existing literature, we offer suggestions to teachers seeking to conduct action research directed towards developing their own SEL curriculum and to academic researchers collaborating with educators to develop SEL interventions and measurements.

1. Develop and utilize formative assessments. An SEL curriculum should not be “one-size-fits-all.” Students’ life experiences and needs will vary. Both pre and ongoing formative assessment is essential to ensuring an SEL curriculum meets learner’s needs in relevant ways. As expressed in the Background section, for teachers to design relevant SEL curriculum, they need to know “where” learners are along an SEC continuum. Ideal formative assessments should include descriptive learning progressions that provide feedback to teachers and learners as to where learners are in relation to the SEL goals. The SSIS-SEL monitoring scales (Gresham and Elliott, 2008) could be a starting point for developing these progressions.
2. Develop and utilize a summative assessment. Without a summative assessment, teachers cannot know the impact of curriculum (Taylor *et al.*, 2018). One option could be to administer a modified version of the SSIS-SEL student form and



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2  
3 administer it as a pre/post-assessment. However, the form focuses on behaviors  
4  
5 unlikely to significantly change over a 6-week curriculum. Instead, the form could be  
6  
7 modified to focus on beliefs about and attitudes towards the behaviors. Per Boekaerts  
8  
9 (2009), beliefs are a predictor of future behavior. Another option could be a final  
10  
11 reflection assignment about one's SEC growth and the curriculum components that  
12  
13 contributed to that growth. While this would be subjective, it could provide valuable  
14  
15 insight into students' experiences with the curriculum and inform revisions.  
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- 18  
19 3. Establish explicit SEC goals. Goals should be set before the selection or design of  
20  
21 formative or summative assessments. In our study, we focused on all CASEL  
22  
23 framework areas. Others may wish to hone in on fewer. Whichever areas are selected,  
24  
25 goals should not only focus on an endpoint, but also the continuum along which  
26  
27 students travel to get there. For guidance, we recommend the SEL progressions  
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29 proposed by Marzano (2015).  
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- 32  
33 4. Measure the impact of the curriculum in relation to the NHES or other health  
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35 education standards. We did *not* measure the impact of the curriculum on students'  
36  
37 NHES skills; however, we are exploring options for a summative assessment like the  
38  
39 reflection assignment described in suggestion #2 but with a focus on the NHES.  
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- 42  
43 5. Use a mixed-method research approach. Not only does mixed-methodology improve  
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45 the quality of findings by providing a broader perspective, but the limitations of one  
46  
47 method can be offset the strengths of another. Also, per Denham (2016), mixed-  
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49 methodology is better for diverse populations. A combination of student-generated  
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51 assessments, such as self-assessments and classwork, coupled with unobtrusive  
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- assessments, such as observations, can assure that data collection methods and analyses are culturally, linguistically inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.
6. Curate a relevant book selection. We selected fiction literature from various book lists. Informal feedback from students and observations of book discussions revealed that students enjoyed some books more than others. Surveying students about the topics about which they would like to read, finding those topics in current book lists, sharing the descriptions of those books with the students, and having them rank-order the books by interest-level could be a way to approach book selection.
  7. Partner with a language arts teacher. Much of the curriculum employed literacy skills. While our teacher did consult with the English language arts teacher for some feedback, a shared curriculum would allow students to more deeply explore topics and practice SEC skills. Further, shared expertise between the two subject matter teachers could lead to an even more effective curriculum, particularly in terms of literacy strategies.

## Conclusion

Given the known benefits of SEC (Abrahams *et al.*, 2019; John and De Fruyt, 2015; Jones and Kahn, 2017), there is value for continued research directed towards developing appropriately-matched SEL curriculum. In this article, we demonstrated how to use formative research to uncover students' SEC and to use the findings to support curriculum and instruction decisions. We also provided evidence that a fiction literature curriculum could support SEL.

In sharing our processes and findings and discussing their implications, we hope school teachers will feel inspired and empowered to develop their own SEL curriculum. Further, we encourage researchers to continue work towards developing and sharing assessments that

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2  
3 teachers can use to identify their students' baseline SEC and to monitor their progress towards  
4 established SEL goals. Finally, we advocate for the health education classroom as an ideal  
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6  
7 setting for SEL and health education teachers as the ideal professional for this work.  
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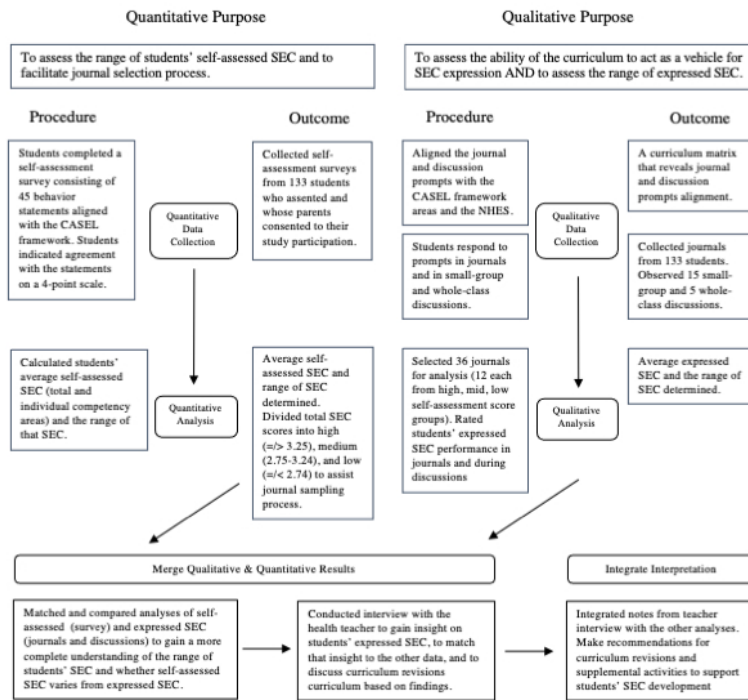
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Health Education





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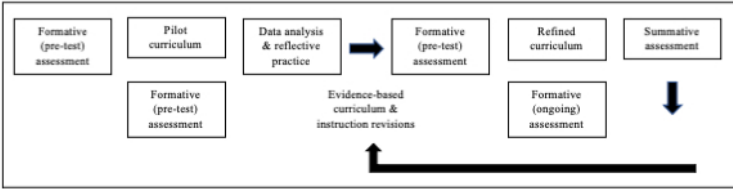


Table 1.

*Alignment between National Health Education Standards and CASEL Framework Areas*

National Health Education Standard	CASEL Framework Area*
Standard 1: Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.	
Standard 2: Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.	<b>Self-awareness:</b> The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”
Standard 3: Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information, products, and services to enhance health.	Self-management: The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.
Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.	<b>Relationship skills:</b> The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.  <b>Social awareness:</b> The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
Standard 5: Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.	<b>Responsible decision-making:</b> The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of the consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the wellbeing of oneself and others.
Standard 6: Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.	<b>Self-management</b>
Standard 7: Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.	<b>Self-management</b>
Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.	Relationship skills  <b>Social awareness</b>

\*We provide descriptions of each CASEL area only once. CASEL areas in bold font are those we regard as tightly aligned; non-bold font signifies moderate alignment.

Table 2.  
*Self-assessed and Expressed SEC Descriptives*

Self-assessed SEC						
Competency	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Md
Self-awareness	129	1.67	4.00	2.95	0.48	2.89
Social awareness	130	1.71	4.00	3.01	0.54	3.00
Relationship skills	127	1.93	4.00	2.92	0.48	2.87
Self-management	132	1.33	4.00	2.83	0.51	2.89
Decision-making	128	1.67	4.00	3.00	0.51	3.00
Total SEL	118	1.94	3.80	2.93	0.4	2.95
Expressed SEC						
Competency	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Md.
Self-awareness	34	0.40	3.83	2.46	0.93	2.50
Social-awareness	36	0.57	3.77	2.39	0.78	2.44
Relationship skills	28	0	4.00	2.41	0.86	2.50
Self-management	10	1.00	3.00	1.93	0.75	2.00
Decision-making	28	0	4.00	2.41	0.86	2.5
Total SEL	36	0.56	3.57	2.40	0.76	2.47

Table 3.  
*Representative excerpts from journal entries*

Competency / Level	Excerpt
<b>High</b>	
Self-awareness; self-management	In all sincerity, we are nothing alike at all. First, I'm not easily influenced by my friends that have bad habits because I know what benefits me, what doesn't, and how it will affect those around me. I don't run or ignore my problems. I face them because facing them gets you farther and not stuck in the same place still problem solving it. Also, when I say I'm going to get my stuff together, I try even if it's challenging. I continue. I don't easily give up
Relationship skills, social awareness	If I were friends with Riley, I would definitely be there for them and help them. I have also been bullied so I would not let Riley go through that alone, I would stick up for them. I know it is hard for Riley to open up, but even if they do not tell me anything, I would let them know that I'm there and that I want to help with whatever I can.
Self-management	I've learned that you need to think about things thoughtfully first and stay calm because I have noticed that Riley panics a lot when things happen to them.
<b>Middle</b>	
Self-awareness; social awareness	I found out that I'm not the only one dealing with the same problems. I feel like I can express myself like how Melinda expressed herself.
Social-awareness	I believe the character is dealing with not fitting in. They are having to change themselves when they are [at home].and at school. They can't be herself.
Self-management; self-awareness	Reading my novel has helped me understand myself better by speaking up, and talking to someone about what I'm going through
<b>Low</b>	
Social awareness	I don't think my character is getting treated fairly because she has no friends
Relationship skills	If I was friends with the character all I could do for them is to be supportive
Decision-making	I have learned that good decision-makers are people who know what they want.

## Appendix – Pilot Curriculum Matrix

The matrix demonstrates how the journal and discussion prompts were rooted in Wilhelm's (2016) 10 dimensions of reader response. Below appear the abbreviations used in the matrix to show the alignment between the prompts and the CASEL and NHES framework areas:

CASEL Framework: Self-awareness - SA; self-management - SM; social awareness - SOA; relationship skills - RS; responsible decision-making - RDM

NHES Framework: comprehend concepts - CC; analyze influences - AI; accessing valid and reliable information - AV; interpersonal communication - IC; decision-making - DM; goal-setting - GS; practice health-enhancing behaviors, avoid or reduce health risks HB; advocacy - A

	<b>Evocative Dimensions and Prompts</b>	<b>CASEL</b>	<b>NHES</b>
Week 2: ~ 10-20% complete	<p><i>Entering the Story World.</i> The reader stimulates their prior knowledge.</p> <p>1. When you first saw the book, what do you think the book was going to be about?</p>	Variable	
	<p><i>Showing Interest in the Story</i> The reader understands, makes predictions, and forms expectations about the plot of the story.</p> <p>2. What do you think the main character(s) may be dealing with? What struggles or challenges do they have? What kinds of decisions will they need to make?</p> <p>3. To what social groups do you think the main character(s) belongs? Consider racial, ethnic, cultural, income, religion, sports or clubs, gangs, etc. How might these groups influence the main character's behaviors?</p>	SA, RDM	AI, DM
Week 3: ~ 20-30% complete	<p><i>Relating to Characters.</i> The reader becomes a presence in the story and forms the opinions of characters.</p> <p>5. Describe the main character's personality using examples. (If more than one main character, choose).</p> <p>6. What problems or challenges does the main character have? (If more than one main character, choose).</p> <p>7. What feelings are you experiencing as you read? Why?</p> <p>8. What personal experiences have you had that help you better understand these characters?</p>	SA, SOA, RDM	AI, DM
	<p><i>Seeing the Story World.</i> The reader constructs mental images of characters, settings, and situations of the story.</p> <p>9. Describe where the story takes place. Could the story also take place here?</p> <p>10. In what ways is the main character(s) like you? Different from you?</p> <p>11. What stereotypes might others place on the main character(s)?</p> <p>12. Do you think the main character(s) is being treated fairly? Why/why not?</p>	SA, SOA,	AI, A
	<b>Connective Dimensions</b>	<b>CASEL</b>	<b>NHES</b>
Week 4: ~ 50-60% complete	<p><i>Elaborating on the Story World.</i> The reader's role is as detective in which they generate meaning that goes beyond the surface of the text.</p> <p>13. If you were friends with the main character(s), how would you help him/her with his/her problem(s) or challenge(s)? What would you say? What helpful advice would you give?</p>	RDM, RS	IC, DM, HB

	<i>Connecting Literature to Life.</i> The reader makes specific connections between their personal experience and the characters' experience. 14. So far, what have you learned about communication, goal-setting, and decision-making?	RDM, RS	IC, DM, GS
	<b>Reflective Dimensions</b>	<b>CASEL</b>	<b>NHES</b>
Week 5: ~ 60-80% complete	<i>Considering Significance.</i> The reader questions which character(s) and event(s) contributed to the importance of the text. 15. Tell me about the parts of the story you like the most, the least, and why.	N/A	N/A
	<i>Recognizing Literary Conventions.</i> The reader detects conventional moves made by the author and has to use their schema to establish meaning. 16. Select a character that is not the main character. If the story was told from that character's perspective, how would it make a difference in the story?	SOA	AI
	<i>Recognizing Reading as a Transaction.</i> The reader acknowledges that the meaning lies within the author, the text, and the reader themselves. 17. Do you agree with how the main character(s) sees the world? Explain. 18. Who do you think is a role model? Why? Explain in terms of their decision-making, goal-setting, communication skills, or health behaviors.	SA, SOA, RS, RDM	AI, DM, IC, GS, HB
Week 6: ~ 80% -100% complete	<i>Evaluating an Author and the Self as Reader.</i> The reader assesses the author as an efficient writer as well as their own reading process and how it affects them as a reader. 19. Has the novel helped you to understand yourself better? Explain. 20. How have your attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, or behaviors changed because of this novel? 21. How could reading this novel (or novels, in general) help someone to feel less alone? Or help someone through a challenge or difficult situation?	SA, SOA, RDM	AI