

Book Review—*Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time: Foundations and Futures*

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Abstract

Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time: Foundations and Futures (Delaney & Moroney, 2018) offers a rich volume of experiences and voices of leadership in social and emotional learning (SEL) in out-of-school time (OST) settings. From various vantage points and with unique voices, the chapters address all stages of intentional SEL programming, including progress made in the field in clarifying and measuring the strength of SEL outcomes and identifying needed professional development. This is an important resource for students and practitioners of positive youth development, SEL, and OST learning environments.

Key words: social–emotional learning, out-of-school time, positive youth development, self-awareness, self-management

*Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time: Foundations and Futures (Delaney & Moroney, 2018) is a comprehensive examination of the past, present, and future directions of social and emotional learning (SEL) and youth development (YD) across out-of-school time (OST) learning environments. When considering OST learning and SEL in general, the authors contribute to clarifying what can be a morass of SEL jargon, frameworks, and countless competencies. Perhaps most important is the centrality of distinct voices and perspectives—practitioners, researchers, community partners, policy makers, and more—sharing their *stories* of intentional SEL growth, development, adjustment, and measurement.*

The volume is organized into four sections and a concluding commentary. The first section, “SEL in OST: Background and Frameworks,” provides important framing considerations of the

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different areas of the SEL landscape. The authors highlight the critical importance of considering the blending of youth development and SEL strategies. *Intentional* SEL is the needed approach, with careful consideration to how positive youth development practices are integrated with SEL. The second section, “Research-Informed SEL Practice,” turns to SEL *on the ground*, presenting practitioners’ perspectives in their own voices and with careful self-reflection. The section provides a variety of implementation stories that capture the promises and challenges of SEL programming in OST learning environments. Each of the six chapters offers a unique lens on SEL practices, representing the many spaces OST practitioners fill in meeting youth and adolescent developmental needs. The depth of critical self-assessment and focus on continuous quality improvement across the chapters is impressive and describes plausible models or strategies for adoption and adaptation.

The third section, “SEL Systems and Policy,” naturally bridges practice with policy and efforts at system change in local and state contexts. The five chapters highlight the experiences and importance of components such as developing a common framework, quality improvement through professional development and technical assistance, and developing and maintaining collaborative networks of community partners. The fourth section, “SEL Research, Measurement, and Assessment,” addresses one of the most challenging and pressing areas of SEL in general: measuring the impact of SEL practices on youth and adolescent outcomes, a unique challenge in OST spaces. Earlier chapters provide rich examples of the depth of thoughtfulness and care taken in measurement and assessment considerations; the three chapters in this section add depth by focusing on outcomes of adult practitioners, youth participants, and systems (i.e., improvement through data and measurement). We can expect continued focus and greater clarity on measurement and assessment resulting from ongoing and planned national collaborative projects with this explicit focus.

Finally, the opening and closing chapters that bookend the core of the volume are an added value, raising important challenges and opportunities. These chapters address the challenge of blending YD and SEL through *intentional* planning and practice (Blyth, Chapter 2) while speaking to the potential for a more unified YD field that captures the moment for strong leadership (Pittman, Chapter 17). The authors frame the discussion in thoughtful, challenging, and hopeful fashions, without failing to appreciate the challenges ahead.

In sum, the tone and message are hopeful, and it is apparent through this volume that our understanding of multiple aspects of social and emotional learning is advancing quickly. The type of shared storytelling and learning—from a range of perspectives and using a range of

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models and methods—is valuable to youth development professionals’ understanding of SEL in its various manifestations. However, when considering that implementation plans are shaped by local and state politics and other forces, in addition to the normal restrictions on OST providers, it can be difficult to envision the conditions in which high-quality SEL can emerge for all youth. This is worth addressing in greater detail.

At that the core of leadership and success of youth-focused SEL programs and practices are the adult professionals, who themselves are social-emotional *critters* with lived daily experiences that shape interactions with youth. A professional’s knowledge of social and emotional skill development in youth may surpass their understanding and application of social and emotional skills in themselves. Strong professional development approaches necessarily incorporate a cultivation of this self-awareness, which can require a depth of vulnerability, self-reflection, and openness to change that may feel uncomfortable for some. It is difficult to gauge or sense the willingness among professionals to examine themselves in this way, to consider their own methods of emotional self-regulation or how their social identities inform their social and emotional experiences with others. In particular, without this foundation, it is difficult to envision how the field can adequately develop and cultivate the skills to meet the social and emotional needs of those with more socially *salient* and social-emotionally *activated* identities (e.g., those experiencing and responding to the effects of persistent discrimination, micro-aggressions, bullying behaviors, and/or bias). The potential growth and success of SEL among all populations of youth may be restricted.

Thus, to the extent the readers share the authors’ sense that this is an important moment in time for SEL, some lingering questions remain:

- To what extent can professional development for SEL program leadership be integrated with explorations of professionals’ social and emotional identities?
- How can planning and professional development support program implementation that meets the unique SEL needs of marginalized youth?
- How does our understanding of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma-informed care fit into models and practices of SEL?
- How do we integrate positive youth development practices and principles into the SEL language and architecture of program planning and delivery?

As a whole, the volume provides valuable, coherent chapters easily linked to each other while preserving the uniqueness of voices and contributions to the conversation. No issue is overlooked, and the authors provide detailed glimpses into their answer to how to best

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implement SEL practices in OST environments. For a review of the potential and pitfalls, best practices and lessons learned, details from soup to nuts in SEL programming and assessment, this is a rich volume.

References

Delaney, E., & Moroney, D. A. (2018). *Social and emotional learning in out-of-school time: Foundations and futures*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.