

**Independent Study
Definition of Terms**

Acronym	Definition
ACE	Adverse Childhood Event (Felitti & Anda, 2009)
ACET	ACE-Traumatized
CA	Charismatic Adult (Brooks, 2003)
CPPSS	Context-Positivity-Predictability-Self-Esteem-Sensitivity Template (O'Halloran, 2020)
CTC	Change the Channel
NCSP	Non-Clinical School Professional (i.e. not a therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist or trained counselor)
NCVT	Non-Clinical Voice Teacher
PFC	Pre-Frontal Cortex
SEL	Social Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2012, 2021)
STAR	Student Teacher Active Relationship (the new toolkit)
The Five Cs	The Five CASEL Competencies (CASEL, 2012, 2021)
TI	Trauma-Informed (i.e. techniques used by clinical professionals such as therapists, psychologist, psychiatrists and trained counselors; Jennings, 2018)
TS	Trauma-Sensitive (i.e. techniques used by non-clinical school staff such as teachers and administrators; Jennings, 2018)

N.B.: My version of Microsoft Word uses "Harvard-Anglia" referencing. This is slightly different from UWTSD's "Harvard-SHU 2013." As a result, there might be slight stylistic differences in my referencing style such as: "&" instead of "and," "n.d." for "date unknown," "Name, et al." instead of "Name et al.," etc.

A study into whether social emotional learning practices can improve the trauma-sensitivity of my practice as a voice teacher of children.

1. The Portfolio

Introduction

In the US, most children are likely to experience the traumatizing effects of at least one adverse childhood event (“ACE”) that will affect both their mental and physical health as they grow (CDC, 2019; Felitti & Anda, 2009). ACEs have the potential to change the neurological make-up of the brain and affect children throughout their lives (Lund, et al., 2020; Lutz, et al., 2017). ACEs in the US include the social and economic repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the hostility and contentiousness of current political discourse, the ongoing environmental disasters (hurricanes, droughts, floods, etc.), and the pervasiveness of both local and global violence (CDC, 2019).

As a private voice teacher of children (ages 4-18) in the US, I continually strive to improve my practice so that it adequately addresses the changing needs of the children I teach. My previous independent study (O'Halloran, 2020) created a trauma-sensitive (“TS”) template for non-clinical teachers after determining that one did not exist and that none are regulated and mandated in the US (Paredes, 2021). There is no “gold-standard” TS template in the US school system and there is no agreement about what such a template should include (Purtle, 2020; Tabone, et al., 2020; Berger, 2019; Herrenkohl, et al., 2019). This leaves non-clinical school professionals (“NCSPs”) without the necessary tools to address the behavioral manifestations of ACE-impaired neuron “misfirings” which affect the students’ executive functioning skills and impulse-control, among many other skills (Lund, et al., 2020; Lutz, et al., 2017).

My TS template (O'Halloran, 2020) was an attempt in the right direction. The aim of this current study is to re-examine my template within the lens of social emotional learning (“SEL”) to determine if I can expand and improve my template. By reexamining my

template through this lens, I can determine if I can improve the specificity and utility of my template.

Rationale

For voice students, their bodies *are* their instruments. As a result, their minds and overall mental health are intertwined with their vocal production, confidence, and ability to perform. As a teacher, it is necessary for me to address the mental health of my students in order to reach them as singers and help them as performers. However, since I am not a trained mental health specialist, I must endeavor to utilize tools within my defined expertise that will enable me to help my students process and move on from trauma.

By definition, a TS environment seeks to approach and change a student's errant or erratic behavior by considering that child's unique perspective and history (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). By understanding this and altering their approach, teachers can "break the cycle of trauma, prevent re-traumatization, and engage a child in learning and finding success in school" (2014, p. 2). Ethically, teachers cannot play the role of mental health specialists because they are not trained in that capacity, but they can play an essential role in creating a positive learning environment for all students by modeling appropriate behavior (Ballin, 2022; Jennings, 2018). In a carefully crafted TS environment, students feel safe, calm, and ready to learn. This enables them to self-regulate, explore their innate curiosity, build caring relationships, and succeed in absorbing, processing, and learning key information at school (Jennings, 2018).

My previous independent study (O'Halloran, 2020) created a TS template to aide in the mitigation of trauma for non-clinical teachers. This CPPSS template included and detailed areas of action within a teacher's expertise and control: Context-Predictability-Positivity-Self-Esteem-Sensitivity (2020). This study will investigate whether the implementation of social-emotional learning ("SEL") practices can improve upon CPPSS and create a firmer foundation for teachers such as myself to address and mitigate the effects of trauma

without crossing ethical boundaries by treading into psychotherapeutic territory beyond their expertise and knowledge.

Planned Program of Study

Aims and Objectives

The aims of this project are as follows:

- To delineate what exactly constitutes SEL and where it came from
- To investigate what role, if any, SEL practices play in these TS environments
- To distill and delineate what SEL practices can be transferred into a voice studio setting and utilized within the ethical boundaries of my practice as a voice teacher of children ages 4-18.
- To determine if SEL practices can improve upon and replace my own TS template.
- To evaluate the overall implications on the future of teaching and research of using SEL methods with both children and adolescents.
- To further my knowledge of how to conduct an effective, extensive, and efficient integrative literature review to improve, elevate, and deepen my skill as a researcher.

The research objectives are as follows:

- To conduct a review of studies to determine the current view/use of trauma-informed practices and/or templates in school and what role SEL practices play either in conjunction or separately via a search of primary source materials as well as grey materials, utilizing books, journals, conference proceedings, videos, and websites.
- To critically analyze and compare these studies through comprehensive literature review.
- To ensure that the type of literature review that I undertake is in lines with the end goals of my project.

- To track, compare and record the findings of these research studies to determine their similarities and differences.
- To examine the areas of consensus and departure within the literature to determine common practices and outliers.
- To determine whether there are gaps in the current research and what future research needs to be done.

Timeline

The chart below shows the proposed timeline for this independent study project.

Task	10/2022	11/2022	11/2022	12/2022	12/2022-01/2023	01/19/2023
Discuss and agree upon topic with Tutor						
Determine and write up aims and objectives						
Conduct literature research and review; compile data						
Create first draft						
Conduct reflective review to reflect on learning experience; incorporate reflective model in written analysis						
Further reflect on learning process and rewrite drafts; conduct more research as necessary to fill in any gaps						
Submission						

Literature Review

Purpose

A thorough literature review is fundamentally important for my study to determine what new research exists in the practice of utilizing TS and SEL practices. As a researcher, I need to critically assess and challenge both my previous and current research findings, examine and identify weaknesses and poorly understood phenomena therein, and uncover new problems and questions (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). However, because my topic is new, varied, and emerging, this review will contribute greatly to the framing and planning of my research, as well as assist me in the delineation and further articulation of my methodology, design, and determine the process for the interpretation of the results (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014; Boote & Beile, 2005). In examining more current literature, I will not only be educating myself on the evolution and implementation of TS and SEL practices and utilizing that knowledge as the scaffolding for my research, but also, simultaneously, attempting to understand and frame what appears to be missing from the existing research in an effort to guide my own (Boote & Beile, 2005). Examination of the literature and how it is changed over the last several years is a crucial part of the “intellectual development process” and will guide my study (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, p. 260).

Methodology: An Integrated Conceptual Examination of Emergent Literature within a Hermeneutical Framework

My methodological approach favors a dual interpretive hermeneutical circle that enables me to assess and interpret data, engage and deepen my understanding, while continually allowing for further expansion and insight, and enabling me to classify and critically assess knowledge acquired and delineate future directions or problems within my research (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, pp. 263-5).

My conceptual literature review will be structured around comparing similar ideas (Torraco, 2016), namely how schools use SEL techniques to mitigate trauma in children

with the end goal of creating new knowledge on the topic and implementing this within my practice. Hence my review will be integrative in nature, attempting to generate new knowledge through the review, critique, and synthesis of representative literature so that that a fresh perspective within “new frameworks” is generated (2016, p. 404). Because my topic is emergent, an important aspect to my literature review involves “holistic conceptualization and synthesis of the literature” (p. 410), during which I must fully integrate “existing ideas with new ideas to develop new perspectives on the topic” (p. 409). Since I have examined some of the literature for my past study, I have already created “an initial or preliminary conceptualization of the topic” and now must prioritize more current research (within the last two years), as well as be alert to factors that indicate possible future developments (Torraco, 2016, p. 409; Webster & Watson, 2002).

Analysis and Interpretation: The Dual Hermeneutical Process

True to a dual hermeneutical literature review, I came to a full revolution and new revelation in the middle of my research process. Initially, I had embarked on studying the use of songwriting to mitigate trauma. I started out with general search variations or “songwriting,” “songwriting in music therapy,” “music therapy,” and “trauma-sensitive songwriting.” I used *Google* to investigate and increase the terms at my disposal and then relied heavily on the *University of Wales*’s online library database to identify and obtain articles. I encountered many articles about utilizing songwriting to process trauma (some in group settings, some in one-on-one) (Christenbury, 2017; Baker, 2014; Baker, 2013a; Baker, 2013b; Tamplin, 2006).

My belief in using the voice as a therapeutic tool to overcome the effects of trauma such as rage and grief was confirmed and encouraged by investigations into vocal psychotherapy (Austin, 2008) and the relationship between vocal acoustic levels and self-reported trauma (Monti, et al., 2021). These studies could inform my practice but since they were conducted by clinical practitioners, I had to confront the fact the fact that their practical use was limited for me in my role as a non-clinical voice teacher (“NCVT”) (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). This discovery was both discouraging and disheartening.

However, delving further into current TS literature, I came across an article that changed my entire study. This study investigated how schools could become more trauma-sensitive by using social emotional learning (SEL) techniques (Ballin, 2022). This led me around another spiral of the hermeneutic circle.

Ballin's article (2022) connected directly with my 2020 study and yet revealed new possibilities. It defined the concept of SEL and discussed the utilization of SEL practices in the current climate still without clear TS template. This study led me to search for "SEL" and "Social Emotional Learning" that helped me discover the origins of SEL, its success rates, as well as its evolving tenets, (Bărbuceanu, 2022; Frye, 2022, Ross & Tolan, 2022; Pawlo, et al., 2019; Eklund, et al., 2018; Jagers, et al., 2018). Further research led to a better understanding and expansion of SEL's five competencies ("Five Cs") (CASEL, 2012; 2021), as well as how these competencies are implemented and used inconsistently state-to-state (Eklund, et al., 2018). From there, my investigation led me to consider how these "Five Cs," if used consistently and in totality, could overlap, complement, and improve the structure and content of my own proposed TS template CPPSS and hopefully increase my existing knowledge (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, p. 268) and be distilled into a format that can be integrated into practices of other NCVTs such as myself (Torraco, 2016).

Critical Reflection

When I initially embarked upon this independent study project, my aim was to examine how songwriting could improve my trauma-sensitive practice. Instead, I discovered the five competencies of SEL that I use to further refine my own TS template. In my research process, I continued to reflect and revisit the Ghaye's strength-based positive approach in "Reflection-on-Action" which enabled me to turn my own reflective loops (and missteps) into a more positive direction by "identifying and playing to" these strengths using the positive stance and usage of SEL practices to avoid "deficit-type questions" that lead to "deficit-based conversations" (Ghaye, 2010, p. 10). I learned that there is still no set template for TS practice but that correctly implementing SEL's five competencies could

improve and enhance my own template and the sensitivity of my own practice. Like my CPPSS template, these competencies can be modeled and utilized by both clinical and non-clinical staff. Additionally, because they are used schoolwide, they do not discriminate between students. The overall effect is the creation of a more universal trauma-sensitive environment (Ballin, 2022). This fit right into my practice and scope as a voice teacher since I am not qualified to distinguish between traumatized and non-traumatized students. Additionally, the modeling used in SEL (2022) aligned with techniques used in my own practice such as “call and response” and “mirroring.” Since my students are already familiar with these techniques, integrating the SEL practices would be both natural and ideal.

The Hermeneutical Learning Curve

In analyzing my gifts, talents, limitations, identity, responsibilities and developing a deeper understanding of my own learning agenda, sense of self and purpose (Ghaye, 2010), I could appreciate how my initial research (and my last independent project) served as a necessary and crucial foundation for my understanding and appreciation of reframing and enhancing my template using SEL. This enabled me to see my practice “with fresh eyes” so that I could determine what worked and what needed to change (2010, p. 18). I concluded that I could more universally apply my SEL-improved template to create a safe environment for all of my students, not only those with known trauma histories. This is a distinctive change from my last project in which I was focusing on implementing these practices specifically for traumatized students which was, upon reflection, outside of my “wheelhouse.” Additionally, in the current geopolitical climate, it is very hard to differentiate between those who are traumatized and those who are not, so it is even more important to utilize universal SEL techniques and strive to be equitable with all students.

In the end, I determined that I needed to compare my CPPSS template and the tenets of SEL to determine whether what I had “gotten right” and what I needed to clarify or improve upon (Ghaye, 2010, p. 18). In doing, I was using the hermeneutic circle once again,

revisiting what I had done before and integrating it with what I could do in my practice in the future. Initially, I charted the differences in language and focus between Eklund's (2018) expanded SEL competencies with my CPPSS template (2020). The objective of the chart was to examine areas of overlap, explore potential expansion and consider the addition new ideas with the objective of updating my template accordingly. However, in doing, I realized that comparing my template with the SEL competencies was like comparing apples and oranges; there was not a direct correlation and the perspectives of the two techniques were fundamentally different. However, the attempt did elucidate ways to clarify, rejuvenate and recreate my previous template.

My plan was to take "immediate action" (Ghaye, 2010, p. 18) to adapt and clarify additions to the language in my template, simplify the abbreviation, and, if necessary, revise my model lesson plan to determine what changes I need to make to implement the revised template universally into my practice, making further modifications based on age as necessary. In the end, I both revised my template and created an easy-to-follow reference tool for other NCSPs.

2. The Written Assignment

A study into how social emotional learning (SEL) techniques utilized in school-based settings can improve my trauma-sensitive template and my practice as a voice teacher of children and adolescents.

Introduction

The purpose of this independent study to examine the tenets of SEL to determine how I can utilize to them to increase the trauma-sensitivity of my practice as a voice teacher of children and adolescents by adapting and improving my CPPSS template (O'Halloran, 2020). My previous study created a TS template for non-clinical teachers to use with children affected by trauma. This study will go further to focus on how the use of universal SEL tenets can improve upon that template and make it more equitable for all students. In this study, I will continue to use TS ("trauma-sensitive") to designate a non-clinical practice, as opposed to TI ("trauma-informed") which indicates a clinical practice (O'Halloran, 2020; Jennings, 2018)

Trauma Impacts the Way Children Learn and Function

Experiences Form the Child

Adverse childhood events ("ACEs") such as those created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the recent war in Ukraine, and the prevalence of mass shootings in the United States present a unique challenge for teachers and other non-clinical school professionals ("NCSPs") who work with young people. Voice teachers, in particular, must be aware of the mental and physical well-being of their students to engage the trust necessary to enable them to access, relax, and release the various muscles used in vocal production. NCSPs are on the frontlines of dealing with the effects of ACEs on their students but they are not qualified mental health professionals. Hence, they are without proper guidance and,

ethically, they cannot tread outside the boundaries of their profession into that of a therapist since they are not trained in this area.

What is an ACE?

In 1998, the CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences Study demonstrated that “cumulative exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) increased individuals’ risk for various health risk behaviours and diseases” (Lund, et al., 2020, p. 1; Felitti, et al., 1998). The initial ten ACEs were broadly defined as “forms of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction that occur during childhood” under the age of eighteen but were then expanded to include persistent and recurrent “adverse community environments” that disrupt brain development up until age twenty-five (TFC, 2019). Although the Covid-19 pandemic is not in itself an ACE, it exacerbated existing ACEs, increasing stressors such as isolation, financial hardship, and inadequate or inconsistent schooling (Sanders, 2020). Ecological disasters (wildfires, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes) also increase the prevalence of ACEs (CLDR, 2019; Wolmer et al., 2011; Wolmer et al., 2003).

Sacks & Murphy (2018) determined the percentages of ACEs that exist in a typical American public elementary classroom: 45 percent of students were likely to have at least one ACE, 22 percent were likely to have multiple ACEs, and greater than 6 percent were likely to have four or more ACEs. By high school, 13 out of 30 students have likely experienced three or more ACEs (Crnobori, 2019). In a 2019 survey of adults in surveyed across twenty-five states within the United States, “61% of adults had at least one ACE and 16% had 4 or more types of ACEs” (CDC, 2019a). In 2022, because of the pandemic and geopolitical events, these percentages have likely increased.

Toxic Stress Disrupts, Destroys and Reduces Brain Function

The neuroplasticity of the brain enables experiences to reorganize synaptic connections that shape and change the brain throughout a lifetime. The brain is most “plastic” or impressionable in early life (Lund, et. al., 2020). When working correctly, the neurons

(nerve cells) within the brain work together to “create, strengthen and reorganize connections ... and eliminate unused neural pathways” (TFC, 2020). Simply put: “neurons that fire together, wire together” (TFC, 2020). The myelin sheath coating around these neurons help to conduct electrical signals more efficiently. Because this myelin is still developing in childhood, these neurons are more susceptible to damage by toxic stress and results in less gray/white matter or volume within the pre-frontal cortex (“PFC”) (Lund, et al., 2020; Lutz, et al., 2017; Science Daily, 2017). Without the strong, weblike, overlapping and interacting fabric of healthy neurons as a foundation, the entire architecture of the brain is compromised (HCDC, n.d.1). Healthy neurons resemble a tree with many branches; neurons damaged by chronic stress lose those branches or “connections” and cannot work appropriately. This cause erratic behavior and impairs a student’s ability to organize, absorb and process what a teacher is trying to teach them (Lund, et al. 2020).

Toxic Stress Impairs Learning

Toxic stress changes the way a child’s brain and body develops by creating a cortisol storm which triggers an asynchronous misfiring within the learning parts of the brain: the hippocampus, amygdala, and PFC (Lund, et al. 2020; Turnaround for Children, 2020; Shonkoff, et al. 2012). This disruption creates a dysfunction in the way these important sections of the brain work together during the learning process (Lund, et al. 2020). This PFC panic disrupts goal-directed and self-regulating executive function behaviors such as “working memory, inhibitory control, attention, cognitive flexibility, emotion regulation, self-monitoring, organization, and planning” (Lund et al. 2020, p. 2; Diamond, 2013; Naglieri and Goldstein, 2012). “Brains subjected to toxic stress have underdeveloped neural connections in areas of the brain most important for successful learning and behavior in school and the workplace” (HCDC, n.d.3).

Combatting the Effects of Toxic Stress

Some stress in life is natural or “positive,” because it alerts us when to be “focused and energized” (TFC, 2020). It is also tolerable and temporary and can be resolved with the appropriate resources and relationships (HCDC, n.d.3; NSCDC, 2007). However, the toxic stress produced by ACEs is “intense, frequent, or chronic” and without the mitigation of a nurturing, protective relationship (TFC, 2020). However, because “children are resilient, and their brains are flexible” (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017, p. 37), when a teacher fully understands a child’s needs, they provide the “physical and emotional space” that enables the neuroplasticity of the brain to form new neural connections and effectively “rewire” itself (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017; Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Kempermann & Gage, 1999).

Is ACE mitigation within the Scope of Voice Professional’s practice?

Essentially, without dealing with effects of trauma, a voice professional cannot reach and teach the traumatized child or young adult. Since ACE traumatized (“ACET”) children prioritize “trauma-associated stimuli” over normal stimuli (Aupperle, et al. 2012, p. 11), it is difficult for them to disengage from these stimuli, feel safe, and engage in learning (Minahan, 2019b; Alisic, 2012; Ko, et al. 2008). Instead, they show their distress through “aggression, avoidance, shutting down, or other off-putting behaviors” (Minahan, 2019b, 30). The toxic stress from ACEs reduces a child’s ability to cope with normal stress, catapulting them into a state of high alert which affects their ability to self-regulate, make decisions, gauge appropriate social interactions, trust adults, form stable relationships, and learn (CDC, 2019b; Minahan, 2019b; Terrasi & de Galarce 2017; Lacoë, 2013).

In order to reach and teach these children, NCSPs must incorporate TS techniques to aide in the mitigation and reversal of the effects of regular, insidious trauma in our society. By training teachers, school administrators, and other NCSPs to be trauma-sensitive by incorporating small adaptations “in the classroom that foster a feeling of safety,” these students can have the opportunity to learn more effectively and NCSPs can thereby

potentially reverse the spiraling effects of ACE trauma (Minahan 2019b, p. 30). There still remains no universally accepted template of TS adaptations for teachers. But by implementing social emotional learning (“SEL”) techniques, teachers can create a universal trauma-sensitive practice (Ballin 2022; O’Halloran, 2020). In the next part of this study, I will revise and reinforce my own CPPSS template with SEL techniques so that it can be universally used to create a trauma-sensitive environment.

Combining TS and SEL to Promote Resilience and Success

A TS school is one in which “addressing trauma’s impact on learning on a schoolwide basis is at the center of its educational mission” (Cole, et al., 2013, p. 11). In such an environment, “all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported (Cole, et al., 2013, p. 11). The difficulty in the current climate is in knowing which children are traumatized and whether that trauma happened outside of the school or with the school by association with other traumatized students (Ballin, 2022, p. 108). However, TS schools do not need to identify and isolate these individuals if they adopt a universal design to use with all students (Ballin, 2022; Cole, et al., 2013). TS schools accept that that *all* students have their own unique challenges (Ballin, 2022).

The connections between the TS approach and the incorporation of SEL is clear (Ballin, 2022): “SEL helps address trauma and build resilience in students and adults” (Nava, et al., 2021, p. 43). Schools that adopt an SEL framework accepts and acknowledges that students thrive and become more resilient when their unique and individual emotional needs are supported and met (2022). Studies (Greenberg, et al, 2017; Domitrovich, et al., 2017) show that SEL can improve student behavior, engagement, and academic performance and success (2022).

What is SEL?

The history of SEL begins with Plato’s determination that in a “Republic,” citizens need a well-rounded education that includes “a balance of training in physical education, the arts,

math, science, character, and moral judgment” (Edutopia, 2011). The main evolving question in the SEL movement is how to ensure this balance within today’s modern school system (2011).

The initial concept of SEL began at Yale in the 1960s and resulted in a list of emotional skills necessary for emotional competence including: “identifying and labeling feelings, expressing feelings, assessing the intensity of feelings, managing feelings, delaying gratification, controlling impulses, and reducing stress” (Edutopia, 2011). In 1997, the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (“CASEL”) defined the concept of SEL and created the field of study (2011). CASEL later refined its name as the Collaborative for *Academic*, Social, and Emotional Learning and clarified its mission to make SEL an integral part of education (2011).

SEL became better known when Goleman (1995) argued that character mattered more than cognitive skill and that character could be taught (Edutopia, 2011). CASEL pushed for a bill to be introduced in the US Congress that would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 “to include teacher and principal training in practices that address the social and emotional development needs of students” but the bill was never passed (CRS, 2011; Edutopia, 2011).

The CASEL guide (2012) initially outlined five competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Ross & Tolan, 2018; Oberle, et al., 2016; Payton, et al., 2000). They concluded that these five competences (the “Five Cs”) “impact major short- and long-term outcomes including positive attitudes and social behavior, conduct problems, emotional distress, academic success, graduation rates, mental health, criminal behavior, substance abuse, and engaged citizenship” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1173; Durlak, et al., 2011; Durlak, et al., 2015; Greenberg, et al., 2003; Sklad, et al., 2012; Zins, et al., 2007). Numerous studies have confirmed these conclusions both in school and after-school settings (Ross & Tolan, 2018; Durlak, et al., 2011; Sklad, et al., 2012). Durlak, et al., (2011) “saw an average increase of 11 percentile points on standardized test scores for students participating in

universal school-based SEL programs” and “[T]hese results were consistent with previous meta-analyses that explored similar outcomes” (Ross & Tolan, 2018, p. 1174; DuBois, et al., 2002; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Haney & Durlak, 1998; Horowitz & Garber, 2006; Losel & Beelman, 2003; Wilson, et al., 2001; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Ross & Tolan (2018) conducted the most thorough examination of the success of using the Five Cs and found that “the results support viewing a slightly modified version of the CASEL model as a valid, and perhaps alternative or complimentary, framework for adolescent research and practice” (2018, p. 1194).

Ballin’s Wellington study (2022) examined the qualitative result of using the tenets of social Emotional Learning (“SEL”) as outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2021) to create a schoolwide, collaborative trauma-sensitive approach by implementing “specific structural designs” (Ballin, 2022, p. 107). SEL is not reliant on “adopting of one curriculum, but instead is skillfully woven into the fabric of the school” (Ballin, 2022). Furthermore, to be successful, “teachers and staff must model the concepts in their own approaches and provide intentional structures that support SEL skill development” (Ballin, 2022, p. 107). In other words: teachers and staff must thoroughly practice what they preach.

Incorporating universal SEL into a trauma-sensitive environment creates an equitable education for all students by emphasizing that “teachers and students work...collaboratively and creatively to promote social justice” (Ballin, 2022, p. 108; Nava, et al., 2021; Jagers, et al. 2018; Eklund, et al., 2018). To achieve the above results, avoid discrimination, and become transformative, SEL must be implemented universally through-out K-12 (with adaptations made for adolescent groups) and the five Cs must be taught and implemented consistently (Ballin, 2022, Nava, et al., 202; Eklund, et al. 2018). This approach enables all students to have the tools to succeed.

It is important to note that an SEL program is not intrinsically trauma-sensitive and runs the danger of attempting to teach “SEL skills such as self-regulation without examining issues of racism, oppression, and equity that exist within the fabric of schools as they do

in society” (Ballin, 2022; Venet, 2020). Within the SEL framework, three necessary core competencies must be present: “knowledge of self, solidarity, and self-determination” (Ballin, 2022; Carmangian in Venet, 2020, p. 61). “Research in the field continues to make important connections, both explicit and implicit, between the trauma-informed approach and effective SEL” (Ballin, 2022).

Transformative SEL promotes this form of equitable education by incorporating the five CASEL competencies of “self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness” (Ballin, 2022; Jagers, et al., 2018*). At the core of *transformative* SEL and promoting equity is the building of “respectful relationships among all members of the school community”; the teachers and the entire school culture must incorporate, practice, and model SEL (Ballin, 2022, p. 108).

Creating a Functional Trauma-Sensitive Tool for NCSPs

My CPPSS template centered around the crucial relationship between student and teacher and focused on five areas within a teacher’s control, namely: Context-Predictability-Positivity-Self-Esteem-Sensitivity (O’Halloran, 2020). This template was structured around the relationship-based techniques in Minahan’s (2019b) trauma-informed teaching guide. My goal in this current study is to examine and possibly strengthen the universality and comprehension of my template with the addition of SEL techniques as detailed by Ballin (2022) and the integration of Eklund’s (2018) expanded CASEL competencies. However, comparing the CASEL (2012) competencies and my template, displays the discrepancy between the terminology, focus, and apparent end goals (Figure 1).

Comparing SEL Competencies to the CPPSS Template

2020 CPPSS Template	Eklund's CASEL Competencies
Context (i.e. relationships)	Relationship Skills (4)
Predictability (i.e. predictable schedules and routines)	Self-Management (3)
Positivity: (i.e. positive interactions and feedback)	Social-Awareness (2)
Self-Esteem	Self-Awareness (1)
Sensitivity	Responsible Decision-Making (5)

(Figure 1)

CASEL begins with the Self and proceeds outward to Social, Self-Management within a social context, relationships with others, and then to decision making also within a social context (Appendix A). The CPPSS template, on the contrary, revolves around the continual support of key relationships (as will be made clearer below). Upon looking at the chart, it is evident that a 1:1 comparison of each tenet is impossible. Furthermore, an investigation into each competency reveals that the successful implementation of the competencies assumes interaction with a healthy, non-traumatized child whose brain functions normally.

Relationships

In both the original CASEL (2012) and the expanded Eklund, et al. (2018) competencies (Appendix A), relationship skills are listed fourth and yet, based on the research, key relationships are the most important factor in helping children survive, heal from trauma, and obtain the competence that CASEL outlines as necessary. Eklund, et al.'s (2018) definition appears to envision the desired end product, but not the means to achieving this within the context of traumatized children. Having adequate relationship skills means the ability to use appropriate communication skills to create and maintain relationships, negotiate conflict, ask for help when needed, and resist peer pressure (Eklund, et al., 2018).

Damaged by toxic stress, ACE-traumatized ("ACET") brains are at "high-alert" and prioritize "trauma-associated stimuli" which causes them to exhibit aggressive, avoidant,

and other “off-putting behaviors” (Minahan 2019b, p. 30). This constant state affects their ability to self-regulate, make decisions, gauge appropriate social interactions, trust adults, form stable relationships, and learn (CDC 2019b; Minahan 2019b; Terrasi and de Galarce 2017; Lacoë 2013). Thus, without clear guidance, they are unable to create and build appropriate relationship skills. However, a key relationship can help them build those necessary skills.

Integrative Relationships Create Resilience

Benevolent Childhood Experiences (“BCEs”) include interaction with a supportive person who accepts that child unconditionally, regardless of what they look like, how they act or how intelligent they may or may not seem. This interaction provides the important foundation for a positive self-image which can then improve coping mechanisms, resiliency, and improve their problem-solving and decision-making skills (O’Halloran, 2020; Crandall et al., 2019; Narayan et al., 2018; Brooks, 2003). One “charismatic adult” (“CA”) who fosters a BCE Relationship with a traumatized child can help them to overcome obstacles (Segal in Brooks, 2003). Supportive community relationships like those encouraged in a universal and comprehensive SEL environment (Ballin, 2022) can help build up resilience in children that can help them withstand adverse experiences later in life. In fact, these positive relationships and environments have both the ability to reduce the effects of trauma on children as well the skill and power to prevent or reverse them (O’Halloran, 2020; Crandall, et al., 2019; Sacks & Murphey, 2018; Narayan, et al., 2018; Poole, et al., 2017; Sege, et al., 2017).

Predictable Structure Leads to Self-Management

Traumatized students do not possess the foundation for the creation of healthy self-management skills (CDC, 2019b; Minahan, 2019b; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017; Lacoë, 2013). If SEL is implemented appropriately and these skills are modeled for them and reinforced through ongoing nurturing relationships, they might develop the ability to possess the self-management necessary to effectively manage and regulate their

emotions, behavior, and stress so that they can successfully work towards goals both inside and outside of school (Eklund et al., 2018). However, since an ACET child cannot regulate their emotions and control their impulses if they do not feel in control of their environment (Minahan, 2018), it is necessary to consider environmental improvements and the implementation of solid schoolwide routines and rituals.

At Ballin's (2022) Wellington school the physical environment, schoolwide routines, community rituals, and consistent interactions between teachers and students were taken into consideration in the implementation of SEL create a more trauma-sensitive environment. The school utilized calming wall colors, soft lighting, numerous seating options (bean bags, scoop rockers, camping chairs, and stationary or wobble stools) (Ballin, 2022). Additionally, areas of the classroom were designated where students could go to calm down and a sensory walk hallway in K-1 involving the alphabet, numbers, and words was utilized simultaneously enhance students' academics, emotional self-regulation, and offer them a place to release energy (2022). Professional development on trauma-informed practices and SEL were implemented to give the teachers and staff strategies (2022). Taken together, these details regarding the overall environment produced the desired TS environment and potentially enable the achievement of self-management. Unfortunately, the Wellington school is rare in its comprehensive approach.

For NCSPs who do not receive comprehensive training because of political or budget issues, etc., they need the tools to create this environment within their studios and classrooms so that ACET students can relax and let go of prioritizing trauma-associated so that they can better absorb lessons about self-management (Minahan, 2019b). An NCSP can ensure the students feel safe by creating a predictable environment (2019b). Students need to feel in charge of their daily schedule and be notified in advance if there are schedule changes so that they feel more in control of their surroundings (Minahan, 2019b). Notifying students in advance of one-on-one meetings via verbal or written cues or using time signals to provide structure to activities or check-ins also provides necessary structure (2019b). In the unpredictable post-pandemic environment, this is likely to be

important for all students. The SEL competency of Self-Management cannot be achieved without a predictable structure and environment.

For voice teachers in a one-on-one environment, the lesson structure should be predictable and have a beginning, middle and end: a body warm-up, voice warm-up, a review of what was done last lesson, correction of theory homework (if given), repertoire review with accompaniment, and then time to learn a new section of a song (O'Halloran, 2020). These sections can be shortened or expanded depending on the age of the student. This should not all be done at the piano. Tools can be used to create a warmer and more stimulating environment such as a small, comfortable rug for the student to "perform" on (or a smiley face for younger students), scarves to practice legato and breathing exercises, colorful (and height-appropriate) exercise balls for both teacher and student to sit on and do face-to-face, call and response ear training (and mirroring), as well as slight bouncing to for staccato scales to engage the diaphragm (and dispense with excess energy) (O'Halloran, 2020). Lighting is also important. When teachers are in their own studios, they can create a warm, inviting environment using soft lighting. However, in a school setting, the fluorescent light is oftentimes unchangeable. This means it is up to the teacher to create a warm atmosphere through their demeanor, the structure of the lesson, and the engaging tools that they bring with them (O'Halloran, 2020). By making these conscious modifications, the teacher can create a welcoming and nurturing environment that will not only enable the student to feel more comfortable expressing themselves, but will also foster more positive interactions both inside and outside of the studio and classroom

Social Awareness: Positive Interactions Produce the Necessary Relationship Foundation

Eklund, et al.'s (2018) SEL definition of “social awareness” seems to be closest competency that addresses the importance of interactions within a school environment. Having social awareness means not only recognizing the norms for behavior, but possessing the ability to relate to and empathize with others from varying cultures and backgrounds (Eklund, et al., 2018).

Ballin (2020) emphasized that the teamwork among the staff at Wellington better enabled them to “help students sort out their emotional issues rather than discipline them for not behaving in a prescribed manner” (p. 110). However, this method also seemed to necessitate the involvement of a clinical practitioner who could guide the child toward “more effective ways to deal with trauma and emotional issues” (p. 110).

Even outside of a clinical setting, validating a child's feelings within their most comfortable environment is crucial (Minahan, 2019b). When a teacher takes the time to acknowledge “bad” or “difficult” feelings, the child feels heard, the interaction strengthens both the relationship, and the child's trust in being appreciated and liked regardless of their behavior (Minahan, 2019b, p. 34). The positive outcomes within the Wellington school were achieved when teacher and staff modeled the desired behaviors (Ballin, 2020). Since a child's teacher is a trusted source, it would stand to reason that modeling within the safe classroom context would enhance a child's social awareness and result in the non-isolating type of equitable environment the Wellington school was striving for (Ballin, 2020). Hence, positive interactions in a safe, trusted environment form the foundation of being capable to develop social awareness. However, training to dispense tools and facilitate the appropriate type of modeling and interaction would be necessary in order to achieve continuity and consistent results and this not always possible or available.

Overall, the problem with the implementation SEL competencies as they are listed and defined seems to be that specific, mandated training needs to occur to ensure success,

but this has yet to happen in the United States. Eklund, et al. (2018) concluded that SEL techniques are inconsistently implemented nationally, vary state-by-state, pick and choose competencies, and often limit their use to pre-K, instead of implementing them across the all grade levels within a school (as Ballin (2022) showed was the key to success within a school).

Self-Awareness and Responsible Decision Making

The self-confidence and self-ownership necessary for the final two SEL competencies of Self-awareness and Responsible Decision-Making highlight again what is missing from the CASEL rubric: the necessary supporting relationships and environment to address and counteract the effect of ACEs on the state of mind of a traumatized child. The Self-Awareness competency is defined as the ability to accurately assess and recognize one's own emotions, beliefs, strengths, and limitations, allowing the formation of a healthy self-confidence and positive (Elkund et al., 2018). Responsible decision-making entails being able to examine and make good choices about one's personal behavior and social interactions, while also taking into consideration the consequences of one's actions and how they affect others (Elkund et al., 2018). An ACET student who is impaired by a chaotic cortisol storm will have trouble identifying and isolating different avenues for that important decision making. They will not be able to draw upon the calm, careful faculties of their executive functioning skills to assess the consequences of their uncontrolled actions.

In a perfect world without toxic stress and ACES, in which all teachers and staff are given the proper training and the entire environment is taken into consideration, the Five Cs might have a chance of coming to fruition. However, in the real world where budgeting is tight, tenured teachers may resist new training initiatives, or political biases around ethnic and racial equity within SEL prevents its full roll-out, these competencies will not gain traction and children will continue to suffer. Children need help now and cannot wait for the implementation of state-mandated TS programs.

Revisiting and Reconsidering the Relationship Template

Focusing on the key foundational relationship between the student and teacher can pave the way for success within these important competencies. It is clear to me that this is something that is within a teacher's ability to control and implement without school board or governmental approval. My new toolkit will again be centered on relationships but will be devised as a diagramed toolkit that any teacher can understand, implement, and thus create a TS environment. This new toolkit is called STAR (Figure 2).

Eklund's CASEL Competencies	My Original CPPSS Template	STAR: "Student-Teacher Active Relationship" Toolkit
Relationship Skills	Context	Tools: • 2X10 • 5:1 • Change the Channel • Sandwich Method • Islands of Competence • "Soda Can" PACE • De-Escalate
Self-Management	Predictability	
Social-Awareness	Positivity	
Self-Awareness	Self-Esteem	
Responsible Decision-Making	Sensitivity	

(Figure 2)

Creating a positive environment through a steady, regular "diet of positive reactions from their teachers," helps children succeed (Minahan, 2019a, p. 33). Positive mental health fortifies resilience, protects against disease, and facilitates the recovery and chances of survival from mental illness and disease (Trompetter, et al., 2017).

Relationship Toolkit: STAR

The STAR (“Student Teacher Active Relationship”) toolkit details the relationship tools that teachers can use with their students to provide foster the necessary foundation for social-emotional growth.

2X10

Segal’s “charismatic adult” can shine like light in the darkness, show these children the way, and change a child’s life (Brooks, 2003). If, within the SEL environment, that child is surrounded by these bright “stars,” he/she can heal and grow. The “2 x 10” rule (“2X10”) technique from my initial template (O’Halloran, 2020), guides teachers and administrators in initiating and creating the type of regular interaction necessary to build the strong relationship scaffolding to overcome ACEs and heal damaged neurons (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017; Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Kempermann & Gage, 1999). The 2X10 technique encourages school staff to interact with students “casually” about non-academic topics for “two minutes a day for ten days in a row,” inside or outside of the classroom (Minahan, 2019b, p. 32). Positive class greetings followed by one-on-one interactions using the 2X10 approach can facilitate and increase positive interactions (2019b). The 2X10 rule can even be helpful if a staff member is introverted because it introduces an objectivity to the social interaction and reminds them that this is about the student, not them. This type of teacher-driven resilience-based intervention has been shown to be successful in combating even the worst effects of trauma (Wolmer, et al., 2011; 2003).

Practice in Action

In my own practice as a voice teacher, I not only use 2X10 during the first five minutes of my stretching and vocal warm-up, but also when I pause to locate music or set-up an accompaniment recording. I do this to let the student know that they can talk to me at any time about anything on their mind and I will listen. I want them to know that our singing lesson is about them – their whole person, not just their voice – because the two are

intertwined. Halfway during one of my lessons with a 12-year-old girl recently, she told me that she was worried about her grandma who was in the hospital. I stopped what I was doing and listened. I have known this child for over five years, and she felt comfortable telling me because I regularly ask her about herself in our warm-ups.

5:1

Maintaining a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative comments with each student, accompanied by a matching positive facial expression, can avoid setting off the child's "negative amplifier" (PBIS, 2020; Minahan, 2019b). By utilizing a "positive sandwich," a teacher can "sandwich" a comment for improvement between two positive comments (O'Halloran, 2020; 2019b, p. 33).

Practice in Action

In my own practice as a voice teacher, I listen to the entire section or musical piece before I make any comments. I keep my facial expressions neutral even if the student makes the same mistake every week. After they are done, I always start with positive comments to acknowledge a specific area of improvement. I pick things that are true and that will bolster their confidence and self-image. I often ask if they would like to improve something (because they are usually aware of their own mistakes) before I make any suggestions. When I make a suggestion, I finish making "the sandwich" by saying: "You had some trouble with this area again, but you really improved the other area." In this way, I "sandwich" the area of improvement in between two positive suggestions. If a student is having a bad day or gets upset by their performance quality, I move onto the next tool: changing the channel.

Change the Channel (or create a new one)

The 5:1 technique builds on the 2X10 relationship between teacher and student. Using 2X10, a teacher is more likely to know how to speak a child's "positive language" and create appropriate activities to "change the channel" ("CTC") with a cognitive distraction

when a situation becomes tense (Minahan 2019b, p. 33). By interacting in this way, the teacher models strategies for the self-regulation and self-control within the defined tenet of self-management (Ballin, 2022; O'Halloran, 2020; Minahan 2019b; Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). Some children might want to do an angry dance to get all their energy out and then collapse on the floor. Others might need a quiet activity distraction like putting together a puzzle. For some, none of these things work and it is necessary to let the child direct the next action.

Practice in Action

A clinical professional who perhaps does not have as much “casual” contact with a child, might struggle to identify ways to CTC – i.e. child-specific calming and refocusing activities -- because the relationship lacks the 2X10 foundation. In my practice, the 2X10 tool is sprinkled throughout my entire interaction with the child so that I know what interests them and can pick out activities that will engage them. One of my five-year-old students was “all over the place” with excess energy. This student, I knew, was fascinated with hot lava so I used this to guide the physical and vocal warm-up – jumping from space to space on the carpet, waving our arms above our heads in a stretch to mimic a rescuing helicopter. Another similarly energetic seven-year-old wanted to point out all of the musical symbols on the rug, so we jumped from one to the other singing what they were, using a simple sing-song interval of a 3rd or a 5th: Whole note! Dotted half-note!

As a teacher of young children, I must incorporate excess energy by enlisting their ideas and thereby gain their full attention. This is a child’s way of telling me what they need and, as the teacher, I must listen to what they are trying to say and use that to engage and help them succeed. Enabling a child who is feeling out-of-control to help create a different environment by changing the channel, can then lead to the creation of an “island of competence” for this child and improve their self-image.

Islands of Competence

To “help children develop self-esteem, we must focus not only on their areas of vulnerability, but also on their strengths” (Brooks, 2003, p. 2). When an ACET student engages in negative thinking, these negative thoughts weigh more heavily than positive thoughts (Minahan, 2019b). To identify and reinforce a child’s strengths and more “accurate self-concept,” it is the teacher who can bolster the student’s self-image by creating “islands of competence” that motivate the child “to venture forth and confront the tasks that have previously been difficult,” like decision making (Minahan, 2019b, p. 34).

When mistakes happen, teachers must reflect and teach self-compassion: 1) self-kindness as opposed to self-criticism, 2) pride and comfort in their shared humanity of which failure is a natural part, and (3) an ability to step outside of themselves with nonjudgmental “mindfulness” to assess these failures (Trompetter et al., 2017, p. 460). Self-compassion is a “warm-hearted, caring, empathic and nonjudgmental orientation towards the self during times of suffering and failure, accompanied by a gentle motivation to alleviate this suffering” (Trompetter et al., 2017, p. 460). But to do this, the teacher must, by necessity, approach the interaction with the student by attempting to see and learn about the student’s perspective; in order to do this, being an active listener is key, as is simply seeing whether the student is able to look you, as the teacher, in the eye.

Practice in Action

With the foundation of the 2X10, 5:1 and Sandwich methods, I can help my student to create an “island of competence” that they can “revisit” when needed. Recently when one of my normally confident eight-year-old students was tired and having a bad day, he reverted to all his old mistakes when he performed his piece in our lesson. He looked disappointed in himself afterwards and I said, “What’s going on?” He got upset and said he didn’t know. So I started pointing out all the things he knew about performing the piece even though he hadn’t done any of them to show him that I knew what he was capable of normally. Then we tried it again and he implemented all of them perfectly. He felt

reassured and was proud of himself. He was able to visit his “island of competence” once again.

Expect the Unexpected: “Soda Can” PACE and De-Escalate

Because students with histories of trauma can react in unexpected ways, these types of reactions can exhaust a teacher (Minahan, 2019b). Envisioning the student as “a shaken soda can” where on the outside everything appears normal, but opening that can will trigger an “unexpected, messy reaction” can create an objective stance and enhance preparedness to use CTC for instance (2019b). Utilizing the PACE method (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy) helps adults to slow down their reactions and say calm so that they can facilitate positive, empathetic, and effective communication (GIRFEC, 2020). Additionally, verbal and non-verbal interaction strategies can provide the student with a sense of control. Strategies include: changing the tone of voice used with the child or the proximity to the child (giving them more room), using humor to CTC and de-escalate the situation, or offering an “embedded choice” that provides necessary redirection (Minahan, 2019a).

Practice in Action

In my practice as a voice teacher, I have encountered “soda can” children who suddenly explode and refuse to do anything that I suggest. It is challenging to adapt. But using all the relationship tools discussed above, I know that I can de-escalate the situation by addressing what that child in particular needs. With one six-year-old girl, this meant seeing how fast and slow we could sing her songs as we skipped around the room – she needed active motion because she was determined not to be contained. She also needed to feel like she was “in charge” so I let her pick out each song from our repertoire that we would sing. In cases like this, sometimes a student will simply announce what activity we should do and I will incorporate it into the lesson. This de-escalates the situation. If a teacher tries to fight against what a child trying to indicate that they need – either verbally

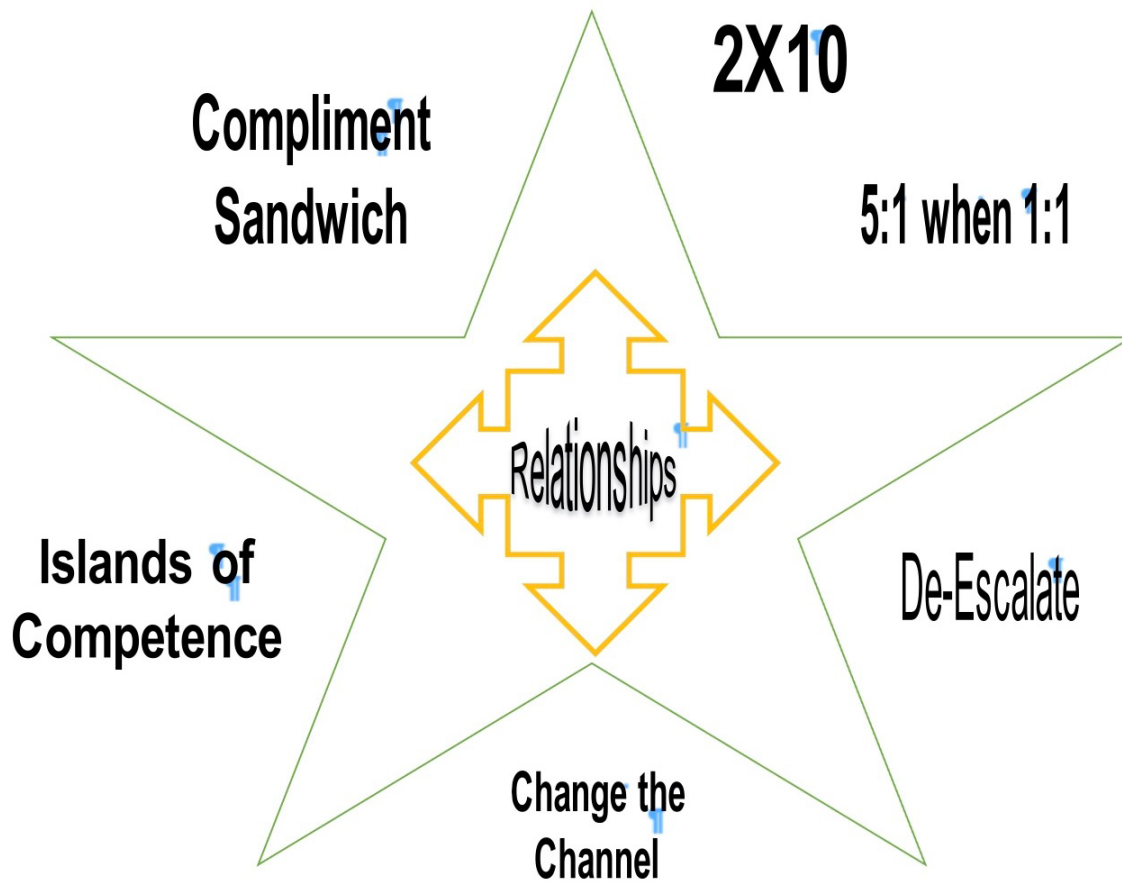
or non-verbally -- and this is ignored in the name of compliance or “progress,” no actual progress will be made and both parties will be unhappy with the end result.

CONCLUSION

A template needs to be inspiring, intuitive, easy-to-use for non-clinical teachers such as myself. The CPPSS template (2020) was, upon reflection, was neither clear nor intuitive. My intention was to create a useful and usable tool. The new STAR toolkit (Diagram 1) details and delineates the ways a teacher can create a firm foundation of trust and empathy with each of their students. The star design serves to remind the teacher that they can be the shining star that the child needs and that, in so doing, can create a strong, resilient star that will shine for a lifetime.

DIAGRAM 1

STAR:
Student-Teacher Active Relationship Tool



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Appendix A

Table 1. CASEL Core Competency Definitions

Competency	CASEL Definition
Self-Awareness	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.
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.
Social Awareness	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.
Relationship Skills	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.
Responsible Decision Making	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 consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

Note. CASEL = Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Adapted from CASEL (2017a).

(Eklund, et al., 2018, p. 320)