DEVELOPING

Self-Awareness

AND

Self-Direction:

THREE STUDENT SCENARIOS

TALE Academy

Peaks, Pits, and Describing Feelings

Six-year-old Jacob is bouncing in his chair at dinner. "I have three 'peaks' to tell! Three! It was a great day, and I can't pick just one!" he exclaims.

Part of Jacob's evening routine is to share a good thing and a bad thing that happened during his day. He and his mom take turns saying their "peaks" and "pits" by telling about the best and worst parts of their day. Jacob's mom started this ritual after receiving an "SEL at Home" handout on Class Dojo from Jacob's teacher, who is integrating social emotional competencies into his classroom instruction. Jacob and his mom almost never miss a day of peaks and pits. Jacob has come to expect that he will have the opportunity to share with his mom, so he reflects throughout his day in anticipation of their end-of-day ritual.

At first, he didn't have anything to share, but listening to his mom tell him about her day using words such as excited, grateful, sad, and frustrated helped Jacob understand how words can describe feelings. Jacob is becoming aware of his feelings and is using words to identify what makes him excited, grateful, sad, and frustrated during his day.

Jacob in the Classroom

Jacob's teacher applies his teaching across learning environments (TALE) mindset to think about how his approach to SEL can be **portable**. He used meditation apps such as Smiling Mind and Headspace to help Jacob and his other students understand their emotions during COVID-19-related remote learning. Why not continue the use of the apps during in-person instruction, he asks? He also uses "I can" question stems to guide his students in identifying their strengths and challenges, a key self-direction skill.

Self-Awareness and Self-Direction

Jacob is developing **self-awareness**. He is learning about emotions and is on a pathway toward **self-direction** (or what CASEL refers to as self-management) – learning how to manage his emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. These skills are important not only as Jacob develops his repertoire of social and emotional knowledge, but they will also help him integrate his personal and social identity, link his feelings to his thoughts and actions, and discover what drives him.

Knowing one's emotions, how to manage them, and ways to express them constructively are essential life skills that can be introduced and nurtured across development levels. These skills enable us to handle stress, control impulses, and motivate ourselves to persevere when faced with personal, academic, or work-related obstacles. A related set of skills involves accurately assessing our abilities and interests, then building upon strengths and making effective use of family, school, and community support and resources.

CASEL's Social Emotional Learning Wheel

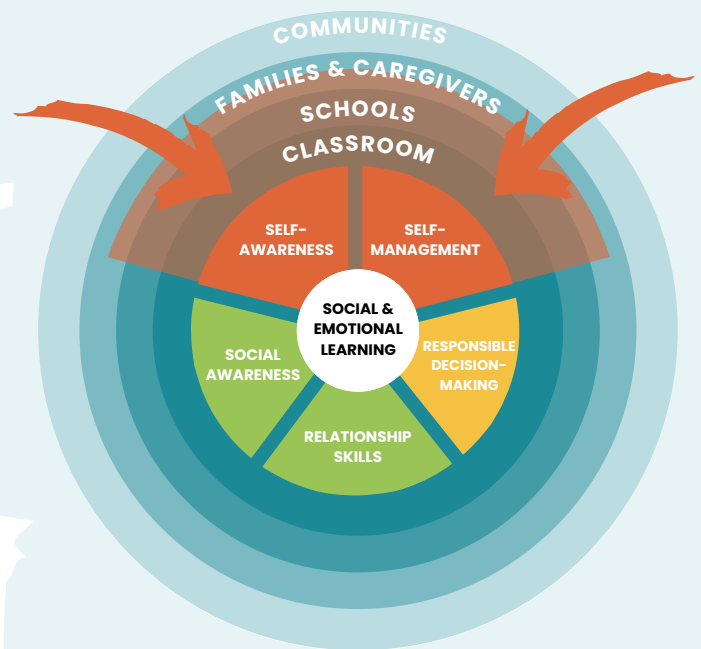## Remember: One of New York State's SEL goals is...

Young people develop a self-awareness that nurtures and affirms a strong sense of identity, informs decisions about their actions, and builds a sense of agency.

Finally, it is critical for us to be able to establish and monitor our own progress toward achieving goals, whether personal, academic, and career or work-related. The ability to engage in metacognition – thinking about our own thinking – includes developing social emotional skills, thought processes, and behavioral strategies. Becoming adept at metacognition can provide a strong foundation for achieving success in school and in life.

Let's meet two other students who are receiving instruction and support to develop their sense of self-awareness and self-direction in and out of the classroom.

Social Emotional Skills: A Tool for Reflecting on History

Quianna is a middle-school-aged learner who is fascinated by the history of women's rights. She is especially interested in the life of Harriet Tubman and visited the Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn, New York, as part of a school history project. Quianna marvels at the challenges and obstacles Harriet overcame. "How did she stay focused and positive when it seemed so many were against her?" Quianna texted her teacher.

As Quianna gathered more information about the life of her heroine, she began to feel overwhelmed by how she would present her findings. A suggestion from her teacher helped Quianna organize how she wanted to demonstrate her learning. The teacher encouraged Quianna to organize her data based on Harriet Tubman's **self-awareness**.

Using the NYSED SEL benchmarks for self-awareness in middle school, Quianna organized her data by examining the following:

1. How Tubman's personal strengths, challenges, and experiences influenced her choices and outcomes
2. How Tubman's community contributed to her identity development

Organizing her findings in this way, Quianna was amazed to see the similarities between her own challenges and those faced by Tubman in her community many years prior. Quianna reflected on the strategies she envisioned Tubman used to manage stress and constructively address those challenges, thinking carefully about how her heroine's self-awareness and self-direction empowered her historic endeavors. In doing so, Quianna herself felt empowered in her own learning.

Quianna in the Classroom

Quianna's teacher planned this history lesson for TALE, providing options for students that leverage the idea of learning anywhere:

- Students can interview a historian via Zoom about Harriet Tubman.
- Students can explore one of many online museums, such as the National Women's History Museum.
- Students can present findings through a variety of modes of expression, including presenting a digital journal reflecting on their own challenges and the challenges of Harriet Tubman. They can use Flip, Google Drawings, presentations on Google Slides, or image collages on Padlet.
- Students can incorporate a metacognitive element to their learning by using an app such as SuperBetter to learn strategies for navigating challenges.

Alex reflected on the journaling he did throughout his semester as a high school intern at an Albany television station. In his first week, Alex marveled at the calmness of the directors; they watched the seconds count down to go to commercial, helped the newscasters smoothly transition to the live shot, and then gently directed staff to cue up the next piece of video.

They radiated calm, and it showed in how the staff responded as the program transitioned smoothly from segment to segment. Alex wrote that he was crossing off television director as a possible career choice. He could never be that calm! It would be too stressful for him, and he knew that his stress would affect others. He decided he did not have what it took.

A chance conversation with one of the more experienced directors the next week took Alex down an important path. The director, who was old enough to be Alex's mother, mentioned that she was not much older than Alex when she started at the station.

Surprised, Alex asked how she managed not to get burned out by the stress of the job. "I don't know that I ever saw it as stress," she replied. "I think of it more as excitement and precision. I love my job and can't imagine doing anything else!"

Later that week, Alex read an article about emotion regulation strategies that his advisor recommended, and the director's words about excitement and precision came back to Alex. The article noted that "research suggests that if we believe emotions are good and controllable, then we are more likely to choose to engage in an emotion navigation strategy that also helps us to feel good." Did the director have an emotion navigation strategy, and what was it?

Alex met with the director and interviewed her for his internship. He told her that he did not think that this was the career for him because of the stress, but she disagreed. She shared her self-awareness strategies, such as writing, using self-distancing to reflect, practicing mindfulness, and labeling emotions. She said that she saw labeling emotions as one of Alex's strengths and complimented him on his ability to "name it to tame it." The director encouraged Alex to observe the newsroom interactions to monitor how one's emotions can impact others.

SEL "Out In the Field" (continued)

Alex and his internship advisor met regularly, and during one of their conversations, the advisor observed that Alex was becoming skillful in noticing how people's emotions affect others, demonstrating personal agency, and was increasingly approaching his internship with a growth mindset. The advisor explained that self-awareness and self-direction are lifelong learning goals and that Alex's growth in these areas illuminates the impact of social emotional learning in the classroom and "the real world." The advisor noted that students like Alex who received support in social emotional learning often exhibited higher achievement scores and improved attitudes and behaviors. Alex thanked his advisor and reflected on what he had journaled and what he learned from the experience.

His internship wasn't over, and neither was his learning.

ALEX in the Classroom

Out of curiosity, Alex's advisor asked Alex's teachers what SEL strategies they were using in the classroom to help students understand and manage their emotions and thoughts to help them achieve their goals. The teachers enthusiastically shared a few of their TALE strategies for self-awareness and self-direction with the advisor:

- Giving students a read option and a watch option to learn about the concept of emotion navigation and related strategies and then allowing students to blog or vlog how this skill will help them in college and/or their career
- Asking students to anonymously post their moods each day on a shared Padlet and answer prompts intended to explore how their emotions may be influencing their behavior
- Using collaborative digital tools to facilitate group research on different stress management techniques
- Implementing monthly check-ins with students via Google Forms, asking questions that encourage students to reflect on their goals and personal and social identities over time

Summary

Jacob, Quianna, and Alex show us what metacognition, self-awareness, and self-direction look like as we pursue the development of social emotional competencies. The strategies used in these stories can be modified for use in all learning environments and across settings - **just as we saw Jacob's parent, Quianna's teacher, Alex's teachers, and more integrate strategies that incorporate SEL into academic and non-academic settings, as well as in in-person and remote classrooms.**

Now It's Your Turn!

In the rest of this session, you'll explore strategies for supporting the development of self-awareness and self-direction in young people. Then you'll have a chance to consider how teaching knowledge and skills related to self-awareness and self-direction can be embedded into instruction across learning environments.

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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