

Howland Symposium and Brown Bag Reflections

Joe Rand

University of Minnesota

YDL Seminar

Engaging in the “Brown Bag” Webinar Series, Howland Symposium, and other events, I was able to further my education about Social and Emotional Learning as well as other various topics that fit well into the Youth Development Leadership program. It is becoming increasingly evident that Social and Emotional Learning is a crucial component of positive youth development. Through the symposiums and brown bag series, I was able to learn how to incorporate some of the techniques of Social and Emotional learning into my own programming with 4-H.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as “a process through which children and adults learn to recognize and manage emotions, demonstrate care and concern for others, develop positive relationships, make good decisions and behave ethically, respectfully, and responsibly” (CASEL - Weissberg). In this symposium Roger Weissberg touched on the importance of SEL skills while showing a video of how teachers can incorporate learning SEL in their classrooms. He proposed that youth do better when they have support and strength from family functions, have quality education, are connected with their schools, feel safe in their communities and have access to quality out of school time activities. As a youth professional working with out of school time activities, it is important that I create an environment where youth can learn SEL skills along with the programming. The five SEL competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making and relationship skills. These are all things that we can promote as youth development professionals. This first symposium was a good foundation on the beginning of how SEL came about and the research that surrounds it. It also discussed strategies and showed an example of how to incorporate this kind of learning. The second symposium similarly touched on strategies as well as data collected surround SEL.

I enjoyed the “Brown Bag” webinar series because they were a quick one hour session each that had different topics relating to positive youth development. One was about SEL which tied in really nicely to the symposiums. Another that was really good was *Engaging Youth in Decision Making*. During this webinar it talked about risk taking and how decision making is so important for youth. The speaker shared strategies of how to help impact youth to make positive decisions as well as some of the research behind it. This research included how the brain develops and that logical reasoning is one of the last skills to fully develop. They also shared how social and emotional factors are much higher in teens and how they can really play into one’s decision. I also thought was interesting when she shared that teens “value reward more when risk gets them what they want” and how this can impact their decision making (Olson 2014).

Another webinar about *Maintaining Motivation in Today’s Volunteers* tied well with one of our selected readings about Volunteer Development. In both the webinar and the article, they spoke about how to motivate volunteers. These topics provided information about the benefits of training volunteers and maintaining that. For my work I utilize volunteers like many other youth organizations do. I thought this topic tied in really well with the youth development that we are learning about and how to utilize volunteers effectively in a program.

The most influential component of the seminar was attending the Central Regional Forum where Dr. Dale Blyth and Kate Walker presented on their own SEL research. It was really awesome to network with other organizations and youth development professionals as well as learn alongside my colleagues. The breakout sessions were really good. The one I attended on Ethical Dilemmas in Youth Work was really well put together and tied in well by playing through scenarios of what might happen in a youth development setting and then how we could

incorporate SEL skills into it. Another part of the forum was the World Café discussion. I was able to help facilitate this and each of the three groups I worked with had awesome discussions surrounding youth development and SEL skills.

The last part of the seminar was sharing and reflecting on readings each of the four of us identified. It was fun to see how the diversity of everyone's personalities and passions were shown through the article they chose and how each tied into SEL. I appreciated this type of learning as well because it was about reading and reflecting with each other versus our mostly listening and learning approach (listening to the speakers for the events) of the seminar.

Overall, I was really able to further my knowledge about Social and Emotional Learning and how it can positively impact youth. I also gained a wealth of knowledge about other topics related to SEL and youth development which tied in really well together. I appreciated that the topics directly tied into my work as a 4-H youth professional, and that I am able to utilize these skills and what I learned into my programs. I look forward to furthering my learning about this topic and share what I have learned through this seminar with my colleagues.

#### References

Black, W. W., Fedewa, A. L., & Gonzalez, K. A. (2012). Effects of "Safe School" Programs and Policies on the Social Climate for Sexual-Minority Youth: A Review of the Literature. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 9(4), 321-339.

Burdette HL, Whitaker RC. Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation, and Affect. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc*

*Med.* 2005;159(1):46-50. doi:10.1001/archpedi.159.1.46.

Fox, J., Herbert, L., Martin, K., & Bairnsfather, D. (2009). An Examination of the Benefits, Preferred Training Delivery Modes, and Preferred Topics of 4-H Youth Development Volunteers. *Journal of Extension*, 47(1), 1-9.

Rosenberg, H., Wilkes, S., & Harris, E. (2014). Bringing Families into Out-of-School Time Learning. *The Journal of Expanded Learning Opportunities*, 1(1), 18-23.