Why Trouble SEL? The Need for Cultural Relevance in SEL

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Recommended Citation

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Recently, one of the authors sat in a kindergarten classroom in a public school in a sovereign tribal nation in Idaho, alongside a half-dozen in-service and pre-service teachers. During this early morning professional development session, committed, hardworking, and well-meaning teachers assessed students' literacy benchmarks and social and emotional needs. In addition to mapping the curriculum, the teachers (who were not members of the Indigenous[1] community they served) shared how their young students need to learn "the basics" in academic skills, such as how to hold a pencil or write letters from left to right. A lack of social and emotional stability in households was described as an obstacle that students must overcome in order to achieve "normal" school performance. These conversations, while undoubtedly well-intentioned, reflected deficit views of "culturally different" people and those impacted by poverty, a phenomenon deeply embedded in the Eurocentric bias of foundational theories of learning and successful school performance (Delpit, 2006).

The professional development goals of many K-12 schools in Idaho include attending to social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom. Teachers justify this goal with statements that attempt to recognize social and emotional stress in the lives of children, such as: "Our students are coming to school with so much trauma," "They come to school with few skills," or "Our job as teachers is to help these kids become more resilient." Classroom features such as soft lighting, yoga balls, and neatly decorated Pinterest-inspired word walls with statements like "You are beautiful" or "Believe in yourself" are marked displays of teachers attempting to adopt SEL strategies to minimize stress and anxiety and elevate self-perception among youth in school.

In Idaho's Indian Country,[2] teachers serving the state's five federally recognized tribes serve some of the region's most economically and socially marginalized communities. High rates of poverty, significant disparities between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers on standardized achievement tests, and experiences of discrimination paint an urgent picture of inequity and deprivation (Dearien, 2016). For example, Indigenous youth are 2.5 times more likely to experience trauma than their non-Indigenous peers (National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2014). Poverty, family member incarceration, and high rates of substance abuse are disproportionately relevant in Indian Country. These contemporary traumas are not accidental and cannot be isolated from colonialist policies of cultural and linguistic genocide, forced family separation, boarding schools, and the physical incarceration and violent relocation of Indigenous peoples from their homelands. Nearly 250 years of intergenerational state-sanctioned violence against Indigenous peoples has played out in schools (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

These statistics are but a few of many reasons why there is an urgent need for educators to understand the social and emotional needs of Indigenous youth and their historical roots. Although narratives of Indigenous trauma and school failure are widely available (Tuck, 2009), there is a relative silence in schools

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1   The terms Indigenous and Native are used interchangeably to refer to individuals and communities identifying as originating in the Americas. These terms recognize the unique political and cultural relationships between Indigenous peoples and their homelands prior to colonization and in contemporary settler occupation.

2   Indian Country is a term used in the United States to refer to lands, communities, and allotments recognized as held in trust for Indian tribes through treaty and other intergovernmental agreements, by the federal government. See 18 U.S.C. § 1151 and 40 C.F.R. § 171.3. The term is also commonly used when discussing policy and practice within the jurisdiction of sovereign tribal lands.

about ongoing colonial injustices and deprivations maintained in state policy toward Indigenous peoples. Economic displacement, continued land encroachment, and the undermining of Indigenous sovereignty in education policy (Sabzalian, 2019) contribute to a deficit narrative of Indigenous youth in "need of intervention." This deep-seated structural racism is often silenced by the soft glow of lights, soothing colors on the walls, and well-intentioned caring embedded in the design and delivery of social welfare improvement schemes (Castagno, 2019; Dhillon, 2019).

As we contemplate the complexities of these urgent needs, we ask: Although many teachers care deeply about the social and emotional needs of their students, are they able to recognize the strengths and knowledges Indigenous and other minoritized youth bring with them to schools? In what ways do teachers understand the unique know-how of Indigenous communities developed through centuries-long relationships with specific lands? Can teachers identify the sources of well-being and knowledge practiced in specific cultural and linguistic ways of knowing? How often is contemporary tribal knowledge incorporated into curricula and school policies?

We believe lessons from Indian Country demonstrate that it is worth pausing to consider whether SEL is effective without situating educational programming within historical and political contexts. Can social and emotional well-being be appropriately understood without attending to context and cultural ways of knowing, particularly in communities that have been minoritized and marginalized by Eurocentric educational and welfare policies?

Zooming out to consider diverse contexts and cultured ways of learning (Rogoff, 2003), we recognize that inequities based on race, socioeconomic status, and location significantly impact student learning and well-being. Diverse student populations are commonly associated with urban areas; however, in the Inland Northwest (Eastern Washington, Eastern Oregon, and Idaho), a quarter to a third of public schools are located in rural regions (Showalter et al., 2017) and serve large populations of culturally or linguistically minoritized students, including Latinx and American Indian youth (Barley & Wegner, 2010).

The proportion of rural English language learners (ELLS) in Idaho and Washington is 3.5 percent above the national average (Showalter et al., 2017). In Idaho, 18 percent of the public school population identifies as Latinx, and enrollment for this group increased by 42 percent between 2011 and 2016 (The Hispanic Profile, 2016).

Consistent with national trends, rural schools with many students of color and ELLs serve communities with higher than average rates of poverty and lower than average rates of academic achievement (Barley & Wegner, 2010). Rural students comprise roughly 20 percent of the U.S. K-12 public school population (Showalter et al., 2017), and nearly half live at or below the poverty line (Showalter et al., 2017). Teachers who aim to support SEL among rural students, especially Indigenous youth, need to develop capacities to recognize the potential impacts of these factors on student learning.

SEL programs create opportunities for schools to recognize and serve young people exposed to trauma, both contemporary and historic. However, we are concerned that uncritical discussions of social and emotional well-being may pathologize trauma or mark marginalized youth as "damaged," without consideration of the complex cognitive, political, and social ecologies dominated by Eurocentric bias. To confront these limitations, we propose adopting an interdisciplinary lens to integrate culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy into SEL programs for marginalized and minoritized students.

As teacher-researchers with backgrounds in classroom teaching (second author) and school leadership (first author), both in pluri-cultural and multilingual contexts of learning, our own experiences support the notion that all learning is cultured. And as faculty members of a public university in the rural Inland Northwest situated on the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples, we see that the diversities of our context are frequently silenced. Our work in curriculum and instruction and educational leadership attempts to navigate ways to achieve educational equity in diverse communities.

What is SEL?

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others. In the mid-1990s, research on prevention and resilience showed the positive impacts of SEL programs in schools. Since then, a growing number of educators, policymakers, and researchers have supported the implementation of school-based SEL programs (Jones & Kahn, 2017) to help build competencies essential for student success.

SEL targets a combination of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019) defines SEL as: acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably. CASEL's (2019) SEL framework is based on five core social-emotional competencies (SECs): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Students are encouraged to learn, practice, and apply social-emotional skills by engaging in positive activities both inside and outside the classroom.

Many SEL programs have been developed over the last two decades; increasing research evidence shows that such programs can support development of the whole child and lead to improved academic achievement, employment, health, and well-being. However, because student learning and identity are shaped by cultural practice(s), situated life experiences, and many other variables converging in any context of social interaction (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), the development and expression of social-emotional skills are affected by factors such as social-historic context, including epistemic beliefs (i.e., about the nature of knowledge) and power dynamics (Bang & Medin, 2010).

This raises the question: Do the guiding frameworks of SEL programs adequately promote the well-being of diverse youth in an inequitable society such as the United States? Although evidence shows SEL programs yield benefits in multiple domains in the United States and elsewhere, most programs are based on monolithic approaches (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998) that typically do not consider dynamics of power and oppression in social structures. Furthermore, such approaches silence nuanced cultural, social, political, and geographic diversities relevant to different ways of knowing the world and the ways different communities support intergenerational learning (Romero-Little, 2010). Although many view SEL as the "missing piece" in education because it addresses important aspects of student learning and offers significant skills for navigating complex worlds (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013), we believe it is important to recognize that any SEL curriculum that does not deeply consider culture as the central framework through which learning occurs likely perpetuates inequity. SEL programs need to call attention to how complex social-historical landscapes influence learning and SEL implementation.

To effectively incorporate culture into SEL frameworks, we propose adopting an interdisciplinary lens— specifically, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014) and culturally sustaining

pedagogy (CSP) (Paris & Alim, 2014). A deep cultural analysis can illuminate why standard approaches to SEL are not sufficiently differentiated to address students' diverse needs (Castro-Olivo, Preciado, Marciante, & Garcia, 2018), especially those minoritized on the basis of race and socioeconomic status. SEL programs must create spaces for teachers and school leaders to engage in discussions of deep cultural analysis (Pollock, 2008) that include the development of sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Approaching SEL as a Cultured Practice

As Indigenous education scholars point out, "all curricula and pedagogy are culturally based. The real question is, whose cultural knowledge and practices are they based on?" (Lipka, Sharp, Brenner, Yanez, & Sharp, 2005, p. 369). Sociocultural analysis of learning—for example, seeing culture as a practice situated in social interaction (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005)—enables schooling to be seen as a space of human interaction laden with sociocultural beliefs, situated meaning, and power relations. Changing the lens through which educators assess culturally sustaining interactions is an essential practice for supporting educational equity.

In the pursuit of educational equity, we believe biases must be acknowledged and inequitable practices must be eliminated; only then can school environments cultivate the interests and talents of students from diverse backgrounds. While helping students develop SECs may seem like a useful way to counteract some of the effects of deficit models of education, many SEL programs are delivered via a classroom-based instruction format that reinforces rather than challenges the deficit paradigm by privileging ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving embraced by the dominant culture.

Because psychological norms and constructs are frequently presented as universal, the field of psychology is plagued by ethnocentric biases, many of which go unrecognized (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Substantial evidence associating differences in social and emotional development with cultural structures, functions, and processes has called this assumption of universality into question (Hecht & Shin, 2015).

Among the many psychological constructs shaped by cultural assumptions, "how the self is defined" is the most fundamental (Hecht & Shin, 2015, p. 52; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). For example, whereas individualist notions of self are pervasive in anglophone and other Eurocentric societies, kinship structures in Indigenous societies support collectivist notions of self that are "inseparable from, and embedded within, family and community" (Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart, & Kelly, 2014, p. 57). One's sense of self may also be shaped by connections to land, cultural heritage, and language (Gee et al., 2014; LeGrande et al., 2017). In many Indigenous communities, for example, oral stories, experiential learning, and multi-age ceremonies are mechanisms of knowledge transfer that frame understandings of the self in relation to others, both human and non-human communities (Poroch et al., 2009; Romero-Little, 2010).

Cultural differences emerge as a result of fundamentally different understandings of the self, influenced by specific practices of social engagement and communication. Thus, it is critically important to consider cultural differences when developing and implementing SEL programs for marginalized students. Hecht and Shin (2015) showed how culturally different understandings of the self affect all five of the SEL competencies promoted by CASEL (2019). Jager, Randall-Garner, and Ausdal (2018) anchored the five SEL competences in a cultural equity lens, elaborating how each competency could be utilized to promote equity. Theories of situated cognition and learning consider the influence of socially contextualized practices (Wortham, 2001), interactions influenced by larger political and historical contexts. These theories place individuals and learning within contexts of participation in socially situated practices (Wortham, 2001),

to which we can also add are shaped by political and historical contexts. Studies of social interaction and learning find students' identities and attitudes toward schools to be co-created through interactions with peers, institutions, policies, and discourses. What occurs at schools, both academic and non-academic interactions, play critical roles in youth identity formation.

Despite significant efforts to recognize the value of diverse cultural perspectives, "whiteness" continues to be the lens through which educational goals and initiatives are refracted. Here, the term "whiteness" refers to both a socially constructed racialized category and a system of privileges based on racial dominance (Leonardo & Grubb, 2018). Whiteness is pervasive in mainstream institutions and often justifies domination over others as being in the collective best interest (Castagno, 2013). Although psychologists have found a strong cultural and ethnic identity to be associated with emotional well-being (Dobia & Roffey, 2017), whiteness and the structural racism it produces negates these benefits for students of color (Paradies & Cunningham, 2012).

Language and socialization research reveals that children begin participating in racializing processes and hierarchies at a young age, and that school settings are significant reinforcers of racial inequities through situational cues, discourses, and curricular inclusion/omission (Fontenella-Nothom, 2019). The implications of whiteness are significant, not only for students' educational outcomes but for their social-emotional well-being. Systemic deficit thinking about Black female students, for example, lowers expectations, motivation, self-efficacy and self-worth, all of which typically lead to negative emotions and behaviors (Watson, 2018).

Moreover, when teachers who work with marginalized students fail to consider cultural differences in the rules governing social interaction, miscommunication and conflicting behavioral expectations may cause some actions to be interpreted as willful misconduct or lack of cooperation, meriting punitive measures (Yeatman, 2000). All too often, a lack of cultural understanding and the failure to place learning models—including SEL practices—within their historical and political contexts fuel inequitable or discriminatory practices that disproportionately affect marginalized students.

Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Educational anthropologist Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) sparked a multi-decade conversation on how to transform teacher pedagogy away from framing students of color, multilingual youth, and/or students impacted by poverty as deficient, at-risk, or culturally disadvantaged. Like others before her, Ladson-Billings flipped the script on the culture of poverty by examining the strengths minoritized youth bring to school to support learning and by studying contexts in which teachers experienced pedagogical success with marginalized youth.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) shifts pedagogical orientations away from pathologizing minoritized students as deficient versions of dominant youth, and instead focuses on recognizing and building upon the assets and strengths of working-class and multilingual individuals and people of color (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Teachers who practice CRP: (a) support students' intellectual growth through relevant classroom instruction and learning experiences; (b) help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture; and (c) practice sociopolitical consciousness by using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real world problems (Ladson-Billings, 2014). When educational pedagogies and programs fail to deeply consider culture, the situation is often overgeneralized and misapplied to explain "problem" behaviors and school failure (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Paris (2012) pushed educators to deeply conceptualize how relevance is determined, and to what end education should be relevant. For her, learning environments must support or sustain students' cultural and linguistic repertoires and relationships to be "relevant" (Paris, 2012). Such environments strive to maintain and "value cultural and linguistic sharing across difference, to sustain and support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism" (Paris, 2012, p.95). Developing pedagogies and programs that support children and youth in sustaining their own cultural and linguistic competencies while offering access to dominant cultural competencies is a complex task, to say the least. We believe this task to be fundamental to social-emotional well-being.

In the psychology field, many researchers have begun to draw attention to the importance of integrating a culturally relevant paradigm to SEL programs and grounding SEL in a focus on equity (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018; Simmons, Brackett, & Adler, 2018). For example, Kuperminc and colleagues (2009) proposed a cultural-ecological-transactional model for studying resilience among Latinx and other ethnic minority groups in the United States. Jagers and colleagues (2018) described how SEL programs reflect a prevention science approach that usually does not take into consideration students' cultural assets in these programs and called for cultural adaptations of SEL programs to foster optimal growth among African-American youth. CASEL has released several reports and briefs that apply an equity lens to social, emotional, and academic development and aim to help educators leverage SEL to promote equity. The reports highlight the need to support cultural competence development for teachers (Jagers et al., 2018).

A few SEL programs have been adapted to attend to specific groups of students. An Aboriginal Girls Circle initiative yielded tangible positive outcomes by increasing social connection, participation, and self-confidence among Aboriginal girls attending secondary schools (Dobia & Roffey, 2017). However, a systematic review showed that only 12.5 percent of all SEL interventions had been culturally adapted (DeLuca, Kelman, & Waelde, 2018). In addition, "adaptation" may not be enough to account for the factors that contribute to healthy and/or problem behaviors in non-dominant communities, or to cultivate and sustain healthy social, cultural, and linguistic interactions. Again, we advocate using a culturally and socially situated lens to assess student interactions within wider social structures, such as institutions, policies, and economies. Drawing from the framework of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy, we are acutely aware that SEL's widespread appeal for supporting student needs must interface with socially situated cultural paradigms of wellness.

Cultural, Contextual, Social, and Emotional Learning

For many Indigenous communities in the United States, schools have been sites of struggle and resistance in the face of missionary and government attempts to "civilize," assimilate, and Americanize Native life, ways, and languages through physical violence and intellectual warfare (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Schachner, 2019; Sarivaara, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2019). The direct effects of colonization and persistent settler colonial structures stymie the well-being of many Indigenous communities, and contribute to the denial of linguistic and cultural inclusion in schools.

Indigenous students in K-12 schools rarely have access to Indigenous teachers and frequently experience low teacher expectations, inappropriate tracking into special education, and unfair disciplinary practices (McCarty & Lee, 2014). The misalignment of teacher experience and perspective limits opportunities for Indigenous youth to experience success in K-12 and postsecondary education (Brayboy & Maaka, 2015). SEL programs are growing in schools with high Indigenous populations and are intended to address critical

social-emotional needs and the impacts of intergenerational trauma. However, these programs struggle to address the complexity of historical-political processes that contribute to contemporary struggles.

Applying a cultural lens enables educators to recognize that the social-emotional needs of Indigenous youth are intertwined with social-historical context and require community collaboration. Culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP) constitutes a specific approach to supporting the unique social and political needs of Indigenous youth (McCarty & Lee, 2014). It is an expression of sovereignty that prioritizes local communities' expressed interests, resources, and needs and embraces community-driven Indigenous language and culture education practices. CSRP is also an applied framework for instructional design, curriculum, and student/family services that recognizes "asymmetrical power relations and legacies of colonization" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 8).

Critical examination of ethno-historic contexts reveals how school discourses pathologize the emotional well-being and physical and social behaviors of Indigenous youth and communities (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Deep attention to cultural practice, at both the micro and macro levels, enables educators to develop a better understanding of the nuances of Indigenous cultural and linguistic practices (which have been tied to the land for centuries) and to center Indigenous knowledge as sources of well-being and healing. This requires recognition of the distinct epistemologies and histories that define our differences and equitable partnership with Indigenous educators and leaders.

Similarly, educators and school leaders must seek to understand the diversities of cultural practice within geographies by adopting lenses and pedagogies that critically attend to space and place. In the Inland Northwest, contemplating well-being in relationship to space and place helps educators to challenge deep-seated either/or binaries that position place and identity as static categories, such as rural or urban, White or cultural "other." These common identity tropes oversimplify diverse identities within geographies and the social and emotional needs of students with them.

Anthony-Stevens and Langford (2019) proposed the concept of "diverse ruralities" in an attempt to highlight the intersectional inequities with and across rural communities and schools. To effect change, teachers and school leaders must examine their assumptions and beliefs to purposefully attend to rural students' social, emotional, and academic needs (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006). Attending to social and emotional well-being is dynamic and should be approached with an ability to recognize students' cultural and linguistic repertoires and value cultural and linguistic sharing across difference (Paris, 2012). Just as CSRP encourages pedagogies to sustain and revitalize Indigenous lifeways through schooling, culturally responsive and sustaining approaches to the social and academic needs of students in rurality should consider practices unique to rural communities in intersectional and social justice-oriented ways.

Placing SEL in Dialogue With CRP and CSP

A growing body of evidence reveals that cultural identity plays a critically important role in the social-emotional well-being of marginalized students (Gee et al., 2014). Thus, effectively engaging SEL in diverse contexts requires interrogating the cultural assumptions that underpin psychoeducational practices. As suggested, applying a cultural lens to SEL will "produce richer theory and practice" (Hecht & Shin, 2015, p. 62). Here are some pathways to explore the cross-pollination of culturally revitalizing pedagogy (CRP) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) with SEL programs.

Anti-Colonial Stances

Ethnocentric biases and damaging deficit orientations can be traced to societal arrangements established during colonization and maintained by settler colonialism. Calling out the historical structures that created hierarches of privilege and oppression are necessary to reimagine relationships within and beyond classrooms and schools (Patel, 2014). Critical, culturally conscious approaches that affirm the histories, experiences, and distinctive cultural values of those whose needs are being served must replace traditional (e.g., colonial) approaches rooted in whiteness (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Furthermore, educator's need pre-service and in-service spaces to identify, reflect, and unpack their own stereotypes, biases, microagressions, etc. and where these ideas come from.

The myth of universal behaviors must be challenged. Any assumptions of superiority or attempts to establish authoritarian dominance must be examined and decentered in efforts to support diverse communities, especially those marginalized by race, class, and language. In addition to increasing inclusivity in classrooms and schools, entrenched issues of race and ethnicity must be explicitly considered in the development and delivery of SEL programs to truly address systemic inequities in the education system. SEL program developers must dedicate material resources to supporting a critically culturally conscious approach to student learning.

Cultural Integration

Achieving cultural integration requires implementing culturally responsive teaching and a CRP. These two practices are rooted in sociocultural strategies that emphasize constituent involvement by connecting academic concepts with students' cultural knowledge, creating space for students to reflect on their own lives and society on their terms, supporting cultural competence by investing time and resources to support students to learn about their own and other cultures, and pursuing social justice through critiques of discourses of oppression.

Many studies reveal how educators can employ culturally relevant education across academic content areas. Thus, SECs need to be intertwined with cultural competencies in order to be able to address the SEL of the whole child. In addition, culturally relevant approaches involve tailoring SEL delivery to the cultural norms of local communities and families, the current generation of youth, specific races/ethnicities, and the social/political climate. Paradoxically, scholars have consistently recommended taking a non-differentiated approach to SEL program implementation. This needs to change if SEL programs are to effectively address the social-emotional needs of marginalized students. More youth benefit when school professionals integrate SEL in culturally relevant ways.

Implementing SEL Programs for Teachers and School Leaders

The SECs of teachers and school leaders play a pivotal role in advancing transformative SEL programs in schools. Recent evidence shows that teachers and their students both derive benefits from mindfulness interventions (Elreda, Jennings, DeMauro, Mischenko, & Brown, 2019; Jennings, 2015). However, these benefits might be limited by teachers' lack of cultural awareness and their culture- and class-related assumptions and preferences; often, teachers have less productive relationships with lower-income students and students of color than with White students from better-resourced backgrounds. As such, teachers' cultural awareness and sensibilities warrant systematic attention. Such awareness would help

prevent teachers from embracing false notions of color-blindness, power-blindness, and humanist-caring that obscure sociopolitical realities. We assume that these competencies would support equitable practices and facilitate empowerment among marginalized students. Pre- and in-service training activities (e.g., home visits, service learning) that reflect authentic interest in students' lived experiences best support the development of cultural awareness.

Adopting a Critically Conscious Approach

Students can learn to recognize how social and political contexts may contribute to their marginalization in the education system. Critically conscious principles can be applied to develop different types of SEL interventions aimed at changing school practices. Students and parents could engage in small group discussions about how race-, class-, and gender-related issues affect their school experiences. For example, to contextualize violence, curricula should uncover the histories and policies that contribute to poverty and marginalization in students' communities. Understanding these histories enables students to reflect on their reactions to circumstances and to recognize violence as perpetuating oppression and lack of well-being across generations. School professionals could intentionally dialogue with students to identify specific strengths and resources that enable them to remain engaged in the educational system despite significant oppression and obstacles.

SEL Informed by Students' Lived Experiences

Transforming the educational system is an endeavor that requires persistent collective effort over the long haul. Teachers and school administrators can determine how the implementation of SEL at their schools is informed by the lived experiences of their students. Returning to the situation in the opening vignette, educators in Idaho's Indian Country could better serve Indigenous youth by being willing to conceptualize social and emotional well-being from the cultural and historical perspective of tribal communities. This would include consideration of the complexity of sociopolitical and economic terrains and structures that warrant the modification of SEL approaches.

Educators must have the courage to engage in honest self-reflection about personal biases, which may elicit uncomfortable emotions about inequity. When implementing SEL programs, the historical legacy of racism and exclusion in our public education system must be acknowledged. An equity lens must be applied to our collective work; we must question our fundamental assumptions about educational practices. Although the path forward may be challenging, the potential to create inclusive, joyful, liberating learning environments in which *all* students can thrive and discover their unique gifts and talents is tremendous.

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