

Welcome!

Welcome to another newsletter from the SEAL Community. We've masses of new resources, fascinating research and some great tips from schools.

News Update

Free event: Social and Emotional Learning for Pupil Wellbeing 18th March, 4.30 – 6 pm, London and online

Last year Jean Gross from the SEAL Community worked with a group of London teachers to help them develop approaches to social, emotional and mental health needs. They identified particular issues in their class groups (behaviour in class, playground problems, anxiety) and implemented approaches like Zones of Regulation and conflict resolution.



The results were amazing, so we thought they should write a book! We'll be discussing SEL and launching the book (*Improving Behaviour and Wellbeing in Primary Schools: Harnessing Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom and Beyond*) at a free event at which attendees (in person or online) can access a 20% discount. Sign up [here](#).

Only two weeks to go! Empathy Week is coming on 26th February



Don't forget to register your school to take part in Empathy Week – this year free for all schools. It takes place 26th February - 1st March 2024 and you can register [here](#).

You'll be able to book students onto live events, and download film-based assemblies – two per age group. Each assembly contains a short film, and an accompanying PowerPoint that includes questions,

activities and Empathy Week's much-loved 'Feelings Wheel'.

EmpathyLab 20th February event

To celebrate the launch of the eighth Read for Empathy collection, EmpathyLab are offering new, online training exploring how to make the best use of the collection. This practical 90-minute twilight session on 20th February will provide

- An overview of the new 2024 collection – 65 very diverse, very contemporary books

- Ideas for using the books to build four specific empathy skills: perspective-taking; emotional vocabulary; empathic communication; social action
- Two Empathy StoryKits – resources with ideas for creative, immersive activities linked to two of the collection's titles

Book your place [here](#). There is a cost for participants.

Off-rolling soars



State schools are 'off-rolling' weak pupils a few months before their GCSE exams in an attempt to protect overall results, according to a report 'Suspending Reality' from the Centre for Social Justice

Read the research [here](#)

More than half young people say school pressures are affecting their mental health

'School is too much pressure'. More than half of young people taking part in a survey identified school as a contributing factor to poor mental health, including factors such as the stress, worry and fear they experienced in school, as well as workload, rules and relationships. Read the research [here](#)

Sharing practice

A totally brilliant idea – the Human Library at Ladybridge High School in Bolton



Ladybridge High School in Bolton have created a distinctive approach to personal development with a focus on developing learners' curiosity, commitment, kindness, respectfulness, teamwork, resilience and agency. As an example, learners can elect to visit the 'Human Library' during weekly 30-minute personal development time, where they learn from another young person who has knowledge and life experiences that are different to their own. Great for empathy, valuing diversity, oracy, self-efficacy ... and learning from other students' interests and passions. Watch the film at <https://bigeducation.org/nb10-schools/ladybridge-high-school/> to see how it works. Look out for the cheese!

How to stress like a champion

How about a cross-curricular module on stress, taking it beyond just PSHE?

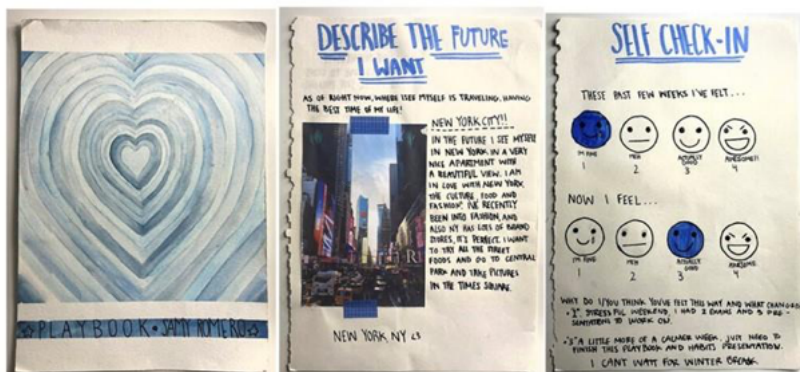


This is what they've done at an American high school. Understanding the human brain and its role in modulating stress was first. In science, students dissected and examined sheep brains. They learned about the brain's amygdala and how mindfulness exercises or increasing physical exercise can affect its ability to manage stress, fear or anger.

Another biology teacher had students examine the effects of exercise not just their heart rates, but on their

mental outlook and ability to slow down.

The students were taught a range of calming techniques including box breathing and doing body scans from the soles of the feet upwards, where they become aware of the sensations around them.

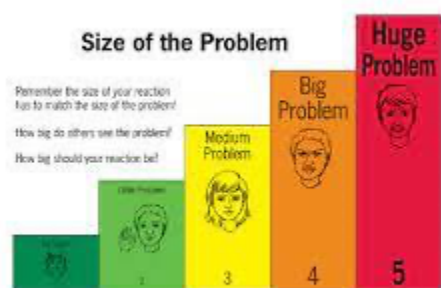


They created artwork to reflect their learning about neuroscience. In literacy classes they each created a digital or print playbook for their own wellness – breathing exercises, journaling, or going to the gym etc.

In the school grounds stones have been used to lay out a series of concentric circles for students to 'walk the labyrinth', reflecting on a worry or other big feeling as they walk into the centre, then using breathing techniques to calm themselves on the way out,

The students later presented at a national education conference, where they set up stations for teachers — a labyrinth walk, yoga, breathing exercises, body scans and other sensory stations like aromatherapy. They explained what they had learned about the brain-body connection and how coping mechanisms have helped them.

The size of the problem



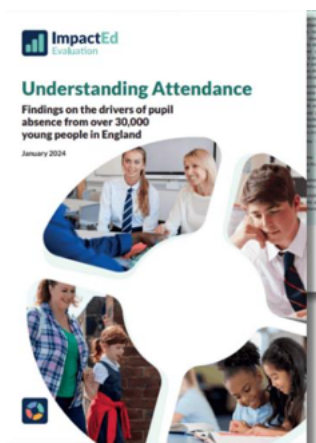
Anna Parker, an elementary school teacher at Lister Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington, [asks students to rate problems on a scale from 1 to 5](#), and reflect on what sort of response each problem merits. Students discuss why yelling or throwing things because of a missing pencil, for example, would be considered overreacting. Calibrating responses, Parker says, is something she teaches throughout the year, "so that students in the moment will think, 'I can take a second, then I can react appropriately'." We've uploaded the size of the

problem worksheet [here](#), with thanks to Leah Kuypers and her brilliant Zones of Regulation approach.

Practical tools and tips

Tackling the attendance problem

Everyone is talking about the post-COVID increase in attendance problems, and we've been thinking about the contribution that social and emotional learning can make to tackling the issue – particularly by creating a sense of belonging in school. You can read an article we wrote about this [here](#), or [here](#) if you're not a Tes subscriber.



You may also be interested in recent ImpactEd [research on factors contributing to attendance problems](#); the researchers found that pupils' awareness of sanctions and consequences weren't strongly linked to school attendance. Nor were their measured wellbeing, anxiety or grit. What mattered was pupils' relationships with peers and teachers, and their sense of school membership (school connectedness).

We've uploaded here a version we created of the school connectedness [assessment tool](#) the researchers used (the 'Belonging Scale'). You may want to try it with individual pupils you are concerned about.

How can social and emotional learning help to create a sense of belonging? Well, the free national SEAL resources on this website provide a whole-school approach to belonging (assemblies, lessons, everyday follow-up ideas) in the primary *New Beginnings* and *Getting on and Falling out* Themes, and the secondary *Y7 Introductory theme: A place to learn* and *Learning to be Together* Themes. There are also lots of extra resources on the website for those who have joined the SEAL Community – click on Member Resources, then filter New Beginnings/Learning to be together /primary and secondary lessons and assemblies. For example, you might want to try these [building belonging and community activities](#), the lovely primary [bucket-filling idea](#), or [secret acts of kindness](#).

The ImpactEd attendance research also found a major problem amongst girls in feeling safe and that they belonged in school. Useful here is [a resource](#) we featured a while back that tackles the issue of

girls constantly falling out with each other, ostracising one another and generally making each other's lives a misery – now exacerbated by social media.

Jigsaw



Teaching children how to work together in groups is a big part of SEAL, as is promoting a sense of belonging in the class group.

Using the Jigsaw technique will do both, helping learners get to know others outside their friendship group.

Have a look at www.jigsaw.org to see how it works, and see examples from different academic subjects.

Resource Round Up

New on the SEAL community website

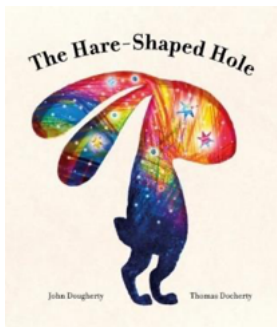
[Here](#) we have a 2024 collection of primary resources for primary school work on self-awareness and emotion regulation, relevant to the Good to be Me SEAL theme. We've also uploaded a [new collection of great picture books for work on feelings](#).

For secondary [here](#) is a PSHE lesson on healthy coping strategies for maintaining positive mental health. This lesson looks at emotions we might experience on a day to day basis, how we currently manage difficult emotions and then some specific ideas for managing anger and feeling overwhelmed, giving pupils the chance to try out some techniques.

For work on loss, we have a [2024 collection](#) which includes really useful Barnados resources for 1-1 work with children and young people of any age who have been bereaved. There is a Coping on Difficult days resource, a sheet for children to complete about going back to school after someone has died, a 'What does it feel like?' worksheet, and sheets on favourite memories of the person who has died. We also have in the collection a primary lesson from Place to Be on 'Our important People', in which children reflect on important people who have died or whom they no longer have much contact with. It is based on the lovely book *The Invisible String*.

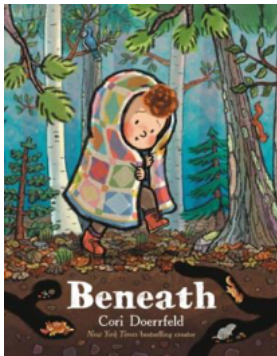
Learning Activity 4 in [this resource](#) from Northern Ireland has interesting ideas for creative work on loss.

New books about loss to share with a primary class.



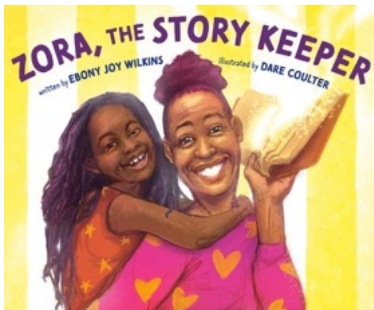
The hare-shaped hole by John and Thomas Docherty is one to use if a class member has experienced bereavement.

It generates lots of discussion about how best to support them..



Beneath, by Cori Doerrfeld is a gentle, warm story, in which a grieving child named Finn and their grieving grandfather go for a hike together. Finn learns that people, just like the elements of nature he sees, are more than they appear. Grandpa explains that sometimes beneath a person who seems like they won't understand what you're feeling, is someone feeling the exact same way.

After reading, children can create their own "x-ray" art, in the style of the illustrations in the book, revealing something happening beneath what people can see on the surface.



Zora, the Story Keeper, by Ebony Joy Wilkins, is a poignant homage to storytelling, family history, and relationships. Zora cherishes her time with Aunt Bea until her illness and death, after which Zora assumes the role of the family's "story keeper." This book invites discussions about how telling stories about our loved ones is a way to keep them present even when they're not around. Teachers can prompt students to become "story keepers" by having them ask their elders about memorable stories and then writing and sharing these narratives with each other.

'Let's talk about anxiety'

is a new animation and teacher toolkit from Anna Freud, which looks at the topic of anxiety. Aimed at 11-13 year olds it offers top tips on how to manage feelings of anxiety when they arise and helps to explain that anxiety is a normal emotion. Through the use of this animation and resources, students will learn:

- that different people may experience anxiety differently and in response to different stimuli
- that anxiety can affect our bodies as well as our minds
- strategies that help them to regulate strong feelings
- coping strategies that could help people in different situations

The toolkit contains materials for running a lesson and an assembly, as well as guidance for teachers, PSHE co-ordinators and parents/carers.

Find the resources here <https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/let-s-talk-about-anxiety-animation-and-teacher-toolkit/?s=03>

Beano resources



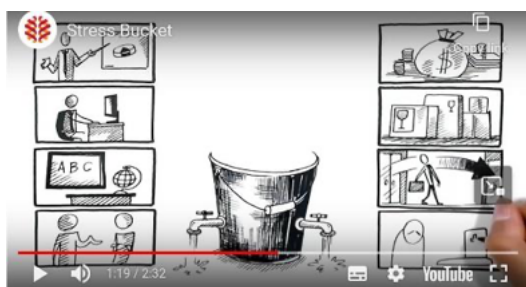
We've featured these before but just as a reminder, do look at Beano's KS1 and 2 resources on understanding and managing emotions at https://schools.beano.com/lesson_plan_category/bouncebackability/

The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse



In case you haven't see them, we'd also like to flag up the National Literacy Trust's lovely primary wellbeing resources .The assemblies and lesson plans provide pupils with the opportunity to explore Charlie Mackesy's book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* and reflect on themes of mental wellbeing through the characters and events in the text. Find them at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/childrens-mental-health-week/>

How big is your stress bucket?



We love this short animation and activity from Young Minds to help young people identify what is causing them stress and what they can do to help reduce it. It explains how genetics and other factors influence the size of our stress bucket, determining how much stress it can hold before it overflows. It also explains how even though we can't necessarily change the size of our

bucket, we can use taps on the bucket (stress-relieving strategies) to release some of the stress before it gets to overflowing point. Find the resources [here](#)

Now Press Play



Many schools are using Now Press Play to provide virtual reality curriculum experiences for their children. T

here are some new PSHE experiences ('Healthy Relationships') for KS1 and 2 which teach pupils about empathy and kindness, as well as how to navigate tricky friendships. Plus existing resources on understanding feelings. Find out more at

https://nowpressplay.co.uk/pshe-experiences-childrens-mental-health-week/?utm_source=headteacherchat&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=benefits

Worry and self-soothe boxes



There are some great tips [here](#) from Young Minds about how to make self-soothe boxes to help them with self-regulation when anxious or upset – written by young people for young people, and with video.

[This link](#) is good to share with parents/carers of primary aged children, explaining what worry boxes are and how they can make one with their child.

The fight/flight response in song

If you've been teaching your class how the nervous system and the fight/flight response works, check out GoNoodle's [musical version](#). Suitable for KS2 as a way of reinforcing ideas you've already taught.

Also from GoNoodle, 'How do you feel?' [This](#) is a really catchy song/video, which helps primary children see that all feelings are valid and can be shared. Good for assemblies.

It comes with reflective [minilesson plans](#) too.

Exam stress

Check out this secondary [exam stress resource](#) from Public Health England. It includes a lesson plan, PowerPoint, tips for pupils and accompanying videos. Using the concept of designing an 'exam buddy' app to help them, students develop helpful strategies for managing their own exam stress and supporting friends who may also be experiencing stress.

And here are some great ideas here from Pooky Knightsmith to help both primary and secondary learners plan ahead for the moment their brain goes blank in an exam or test: use a taught breathing strategy, use a grounding strategy and/or 'I can' self-talk coping statements.



New resources from the UK Trauma Council

The UK Trauma Council have created several [resources](#) to support children and young people affected by war, migration, and/or asylum, including an excellent animation on the effects of trauma co-produced with young people – subtitled into several languages.

Social Action

‘Social action’ (children and young people making a difference) is a great way to develop social and emotional skills. We’re impressed by the practical, free resources at [SuperKind](#) (a non-profit social action platform for schools that is on a mission to educate, inspire and empower the next generation of change-makers through the amazing power of social action).

Also useful are the free Place2Be resources, developed for this year’s children’s Mental Health Week but worth storing away for any time of year. Themed around ‘My Voice Matters’, they focus on children and young people finding their voice and making a difference. Find the assemblies, lesson ideas and activities [here](#).

Early Years self-regulation resources



‘[Brain break bops: Interoception and self-regulation activities for early years](#)’ is a resource from Australia, consisting of short engaging exercises developed with experts to support children to feel more connected to their bodies, and to interpret and express their emotions. There are five catchy and engaging animated songs for the whole class to participate in and sing-along. The resources also include posters and activity cards.

Measuring wellbeing



The Anna Freud Centre have published a useful guide for schools and colleges called ‘Using measurement tools to understand pupils’ mental health needs’. It signposts available tools and helps us think about what we want to measure, and why. Find it [here](#)

MyHappyMind Programme



We've come across a new-ish primary SEL programme called myHappymind, which is popular with the NHS and part-funded by some local authority Public Health departments, for example in Cheshire East. Individual schools can also subscribe on a cost per pupil basis.

It looks good – based in evidence, preventative rather than reactive, and with some research showing impact. It is a whole school program taught to all children with a curriculum for every year group from Early Years through to Year 6.

There are units of work on five themes: meet your brain, celebrate character strengths, appreciate, relate and engage. It includes work on neuroscience, calming techniques, recognising character strengths, gratitude, active listening and seeing things from different points of view, setting goals and working towards them.

There is a Parent App to help parents support the learning, and a staff wellbeing programme.

What may appeal most is the ready-made resources: a portal with whiteboard lessons and lots of follow up activities.

Find out more at <https://myhappymind.org/>

One to watch – a wellbeing programme for teachers



Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)®

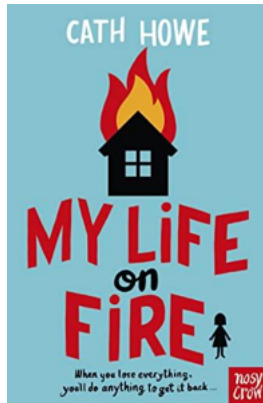
The Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) programme is a US-developed 3-4 day professional development program (delivered a day at a time over a number of months) that helps teachers handle the stresses and rediscover the joys of teaching. It combines emotion skills instruction, mindful awareness practices and compassion building activities. The aim is to

- enable teachers to reduce their emotional stress
- build the adult social and emotional skills required to build supportive relationships with students and manage challenging student behaviours.

CARE has been extensively researched and you can review findings at <https://createforeducation.org/care/care-research/>. Randomised trials funded by US Department of Education showed that CARE not only improves the wellbeing and resilience of the teachers, but also improves classroom atmosphere and academic learning.

CARE is used in a number of countries but not it seems currently in the UK. Online training is available. Enquiries can be made at <https://createforeducation.org/care/care-program/>

Top resource



My Life on Fire by Cath How is a great book to use in upper KS2 to discuss and develop empathy.

Told in alternating voices, it's the story of a girl whose house burned down so she lost everything. It's about worry and sadness and understanding how sometimes people don't mean to do bad things.

Also very useful for work on loss.

Research

SEAL in China

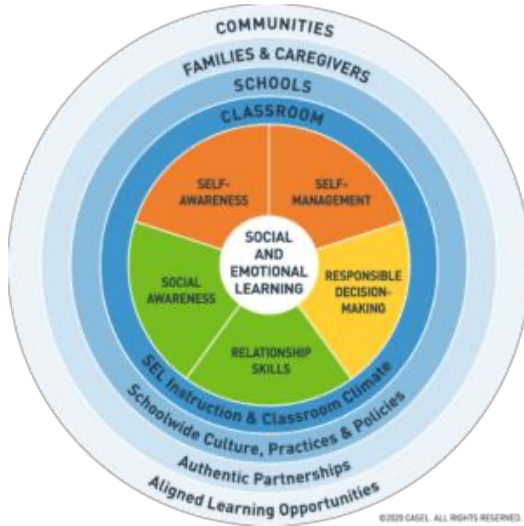


Back in 2015 the primary SEAL resources were chosen by the Chinese Ministry of Education as the basis for a pilot social and emotional learning curriculum in five provinces in China. Julie Casey and other members of the SEAL Community visited China regularly to provide support. The programme is now very much alive and running in eight provinces, and its impact has been researched in [this study](#) of a SEAL-based programme.

The study assessed whether the programme could reduce social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary school children. The intervention consisted of 16 weekly 90-minute class sessions, conducted among 206 children aged 8–12 years (with 290 controls) in a poor rural area of Central China. Self-report questionnaires were administered at baseline, post-intervention and 5-month follow-up.

The results suggested that the programme can reduce children's total difficulties (measured using the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire) post-intervention and at 5-month follow-up. Its largest effects were among children experiencing verbal or physical abuse from caregivers. The programme was popular among more than 90% of the participants. The authors conclude that 'the programme is cheap, easy to implement and can be delivered in school hours. Therefore, it has clear potential for replicability and sustainability'.

Social and emotional learning works across the world



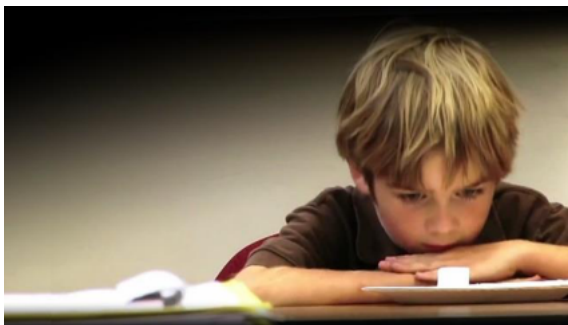
In 2023, several major reports added to the long-standing evidence base for social and emotional learning. Dr [Christina Cipriano et al.'s](#) assessment of 424 studies from 53 countries provides a systematic review and meta-analysis of the current evidence for universal school-based (USB) social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions for students in kindergarten through 12th grade available from 2008 through 2020. The sample includes 424 studies from 53 countries, reflecting 252 discrete USB SEL interventions, involving 575,361 students. Results endorsed that, compared to control conditions, students who participate in USB SEL interventions experienced significantly improved skills, attitudes, behaviours, school climate and safety, peer

relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement – and reduced bullying .

Emotional Intelligence No.1 Leadership Skill For 2024, says research

According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2023 report, qualities associated with emotional intelligence such as resilience, curiosity, lifelong learning, motivation, and self-awareness, are highly prized by businesses and will continue to be so for the next few years. Empathy and active listening figure highly too. Read more [here](#)

Waiting for what you want



You may have heard of the 'marshmallow experiment' which tested young children's ability to delay gratification.

In the original study, children get to know an experimenter, and then sit at a table. They are asked to choose their preferred treat from an array of possibilities, and told that the experimenter has to leave the room. If they wait until the

experimenter gets back, they get two treats. Both treats are in front of the child during this time. How long the child can wait before signalling to the experimenter that they submit (usually ringing a bell) or until they eat the treat is the indicator of how well the child can delay gratification.

The ability to delay gratification, to forego an immediate reward for a better future one, has been found to be associated with positive life outcomes. Children who can delay gratification tend to go to school for longer, have healthier bodyweights, have higher academic achievement and a lower likelihood of engaging in teenage substance misuse.

The original marshmallow experiment was carried out in 1970. Since then, it has been extensively replicated. A [new study](#) overviews the results in 165 experiments conducted over many years in a number of different countries. It also polled experts to ask for their views on whether children today would be less able to delay gratification than children in the past.

The experts tended to think that children would be less able to wait for what they want, perhaps under the influence of the increased use of technology in ever-younger age groups, and a culture of instant gratification. In fact, the authors found the opposite - delay of gratification times have actually increased over the past fifty years.

Why might this be? It is hard to tell. Perhaps parents are helping their children develop more self-control these days, compared to the permissive 1970s. Or perhaps as more children attend pre-school settings, they now have many more opportunities to learn how to wait and take turns with their peers?

Mindfulness short breaks improve reading comprehension

[This study](#) investigated the effects of introducing daily 10-minute physical activity or mindfulness breaks within regular school lessons, for a period of two weeks. The children involved were aged ten to eleven. In the physical activity intervention children's attention improved, and in the mindfulness intervention reading comprehension improved significantly, compared to a control group. The authors conclude that classroom-based short physical and mindfulness breaks could improve attention and reading comprehension, which are known to support overall academic success.

What's the matter with ACEs?

Adverse
Childhood
Experiences

[This study](#) reminds us that screening children for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and giving them a score is not useful. There is not yet evidence that knowledge of adversity exposure leads to effective personalised trauma-informed interventions within schools, and individuals vary enormously in the manner in which even the same forms of adversity may affect functioning.

Rather than tailoring educational practices to specific children based on their traumatic experiences, the authors instead recommend educators focus their efforts on building supportive classrooms geared toward all students, with the understanding that early adversity can influence heterogeneous trajectories in student development and behaviour.

The authors say 'Specifically, regular use of socioemotional learning practices in the classroom benefits all students, and may be especially beneficial for students who have disproportionately experienced early adversity.'

In addition, they say, further research on educational practices, including the use of a shared language for describing and defining adversity-related experiences, are the concrete steps needed to better support a goal of adversity-informed education.



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