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INDA W. BRAUN is the guest editor for this issue. She is a learning consultant with LEO and the YALSA continuing education consultant.

It was in 1994 that the phrase “social emotional learning” (SEL) was coined during a meeting of researchers, educators, and child advocates sponsored by the Fetzer Institute. However, it has been just in the last decade that the library world really started to take notice. While some library staff may think that SEL is just for young children, it is clear from the work of researchers and teen library staff across the United States, that applying the principles of SEL to all ages of youth, including teens, is important.

A place to start learning the value of SEL in teen services is this YALS issue’s article “Reading Between the Lines of Social Emotional Learning,” in which Jessica Newman and Deborah Moroney, of the American Institutes for Research, describe what SEL is, why it’s important, and provide examples of how libraries working with teens can incorporate SEL into their services.

Kathleen Houlihan of the Austin Public Library provides clear guidelines on how to connect library services for and with teens to SEL in her article “Five Ways to Incorporate SEL at Your Library: Supporting Multidimensional Learning.” Readers should make sure to examine the chart that she includes that shows how to directly relate library activities to the SEL facets of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship building, and responsible decision-making.

Jen Daniño and Jared Valdez, from the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, describe a good example of SEL, their Teen Reading Lounge program. And, Leah Tatgenhorst, Autumn Solomon, and Mary Jo Finch of the Westbank (Texas) Library System explain how a library program focused on play and families, including teens, is also connected to SEL.

In this issue, you can also read about two of YALSA’s IMLS-funded projects. Rebecca Ott and Danielle Margarida

(continued on page 9)
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Crystle Martin

Social emotional learning (SEL) is an important aspect of positive and successful youth development. SEL focuses on social awareness, relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Someone’s ability to disagree with someone without losing their temper. Or, someone being able to accept responsibility for a mistake. These are examples of the SEL skills youth need to learn that will help them be successful in relationships, school, and the workplace. These skills are sometimes taught in formal educational settings, yet there is a great opportunity for libraries to fill in gaps in what’s happening in schools so as to provide services for youth that will have lifelong impact.

SEL is embedded in YALSA’s Competencies. As Linda W. Braun points out in blog post on “Teen Services Competencies for Library Staff: Social Emotional Learning” (http://bit.ly/yalsablogsel), SEL is part of both the Competency Dispositions and Content Areas. Related to the Competency Dispositions, SEL is demonstrated when library staff:

- Show warmth, caring, and respect for all teens and their families;
- Respond to challenges and changes with flexibility, perseverance, and cooperation;
- Demonstrate professional and personal habits in interacting and working with others, and model and practice a positive attitude;
- Communicate respectfully, clearly, and effectively with all teens and adults; and
- Value ongoing professional development and continually seek to increase their own knowledge and skill to support teen development and learning.

These are just a few examples of how SEL fits in with the Dispositions. The Content Areas also strongly connect with SEL:

- Content Area 2, Interactions with Teens, includes in the Developing Level: “Listens to and respects all teens’ interests, opinions, and cultures in the development of library collections, programs, and services.”
- Content Area 5, Youth Engagement and Leadership, includes in the Developing Level: “Fosters teens’
Editor’s Note: This article originally appeared on the YALSA blog on May 2, 2018.

One of my biggest flaws is my inability to think inside the box; structured programs make me feel like I’m working without my biggest strength, my heart. So I admittedly have led with my heart on the Future Ready with the Library project. Sometimes that means doing things very backwards. Sometimes that means that my focus is narrowed to begin with and widens as the work continues. I value the monthly Zoom meetings we have as a cohort, simply because there are so many ideas, points of views, and resources, but the passion for the project is what really stands out for me and we all are passionate about what we are doing and how we can really make an impact for students.

I tend to be a very hands-on learner, so for me this project wasn’t something that I could formulate by reading alone, or by talking with partners, or by having community meetings. My vision was narrow in spite of constant urgings from the Future Ready with the Library management team. I live in a remote and rural tribal community and my tribal service area is quite small, leaving, in my mind, few choices for partners. So I jumped in feet first with an obvious partner, the school. I have several connections at the school and was comfortable pitching the idea and working with the principal directly to get a very vague idea of what he thought would be beneficial. I recognize that this is not the norm. He basically gave me free rein to do what I wanted in the fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms, and he asked me to start the next week.

I attempted a survey prior to starting and got very little response from my tribal community. I’ve recognized that surveys are not their mode of communication, but for projects like this the written word is a powerful indicator, so I did try. Typically, when I want feedback on a topic, I put the information out there and then actively listen. The answers to the questions I am asking come through informal one-on-one conversations. They come in the form of participation in workshops and events. I’m listening as we eat, as we play, and as we create to what parents are telling me and their children. It isn’t always a direct line of communication. I have to listen to what parents aren’t saying as much as what they are saying in order to get a true idea of what the community values.

When I began this project I knew it would grow and develop. Great programs have the ability to be written and then changed to fit the audience. I have had some amazing breakthroughs and insights. I’ve also had some setbacks. I’ve recorded them all. I wrote down what worked for this year, but I also recognize that it won’t always work, it won’t always be what is needed, and, ultimately, my goal is to provide what these young people need in that moment to help them become future ready.
Typically, when I am planning a program, I create a rough outline of my ideas and then work to create an action plan. I tried to do that with this project and it was impossible. There was no way for me to create a plan because I simply didn’t know for sure who I was working with and what they needed to become ready for the future.

**Week 1**

As the day approached for me to go to the school, I had no plan, no outline, no real anything. I had abstract ideas. Most times that would make me crazy. I like the security of the box, with the ability to dance outside of it, but I went in calm and open to possibilities. The teacher in me also went in with a clear set of guidelines about what we would be doing and what would be acceptable behavior.

I started with an index card activity and colored pencils. I asked each student to tell me three things about themselves on the front of the card and one thing that they were struggling with on the back. While they wrote I introduced myself and told them three things about me. This is a very small town, I have children in these classes, and I have coached these kids in basketball for several years. They know me, but I told them three things that they didn’t know about me: my favorite color, my favorite sport, and that my parents were divorced. I gathered the cards and passed out small journals, two for each student, one to take home and one to write in during our sessions. I told them the journals would be completely private and I ensured that privacy by giving them a locked box to keep in their classrooms. I am the only one with the combination, and I did not take the box with me. There is some security in that for students—a place to vent without worry.

We then talked about respect versus dignity (something we talked about during our Future Ready with the Library face-to-face cohort meeting in February 2018 in Denver) and laid down some guidelines for behavior. After the initial get to know you speech covering this is what we are doing and this is what is acceptable, we moved on to a short discussion about the music video “The Champion” by Carrie Underwood. I love the message and, while it is sports related, the video showed people from all walks of life living as champions. We talked about what that looks like, and I gave them time to write down their thoughts or draw their thoughts, or even just doodle and think their thoughts. I reminded them that they didn’t have to spell correctly or use good sentences or capital letters, or periods. They all went wild!

**My Insights for Week 1**

Let them write their three things before I tell them mine. Every card that day had their name, their favorite color, their favorite sport, and their parents’ marital status on the front. The back of the card was for struggles, and most of the cards simply said “I’m fine” or “math.”

**Week 2**

This week I went in with the focus on self-esteem and acceptance. I handed out the index cards and the colored pencils and asked them to write down their three things and their struggles. I explained that I would share my three things throughout our time together. I gave them a few minutes to write and then I gathered the cards. I had them line up in two lines facing each other with a space in the middle. I explained that we were going to do an activity called “Cross the Line” that would help them focus on themselves individually, ways they are similar to others in the room, ways they are different, things that define them, and things that make them feel certain ways. I explained that the middle space was a place for reflection and that it was important that the room was silent while we reflected. I stressed the importance of treating others with dignity while we participated in this activity. I also gave them permission to not share even if a statement applied to them. They were free to not cross the line, but I wanted them to really reflect on how they felt. For example, the statement “I have a dog” might cause sadness inside because your dog recently passed away and you don’t want to share at this time, but you recognize the feeling of sadness. I also participated in this activity with them, giving them the opportunity to see ways we were alike and ways we were different.

One of the statements in the activity said, “You are adopted,” and I stepped into the open space. I know that there are several students who could identify with this statement, but they all hesitated until they saw me standing in the middle, not looking at them, not judging, and they quietly accepted the statement as a part of their identity. After the activity, they all wanted more information about me being adopted and so I briefly shared that experience with them. This led us to an art activity. I had an image of a fingerprint on a piece of white paper. On each line, I had written about myself. I used many colors. I wrote down easy things, and I wrote down painful experiences. I showed them my finished art, and they immediately asked why I had colored over some of my statements with a marker and highlighted or circled others. I explained that the colored over things were too painful to share, but that I recognize they are part of who I am. The highlighted things were important to me or made me feel really good about myself or were my talents. Our experiences shape who we are, and when we are able to accept that and love ourselves, we have the ability to be kinder and more understanding to others. We also need to get to know
ourselves in order to plan for the future. I explained that I was afraid of fire. My family had a chimney fire in the middle of the night when I was young, and it was scary. I have always been a worrier when we have a wood fire. I asked them if they thought I should have been a firefighter when I grew up and they all said, “NO WAY!” They understood the connection. I gave them time to write about themselves. Some of them wrote, others drew small icons, others just sat and doodled.

My Insights from Week 2
30 minutes is not long enough!! I realized that I hadn’t left much time for real discussions this week so I needed to adjust for that. Some of the index cards were more enlightening this week and many included personal things from the activity that they shared. Some students wrote the exact same thing as the week before. The struggles were still very limited, and I noticed that the cards that did include an actual struggle also did not include a name because apparently you have to remind them to put their names on the card, it is not just implied. #thenamestruggleisreal

Week 3
This week my focus was still on self-esteem, positive self-talk, and teaching people how to treat you. I handed out the index cards and thanked them for helping me get to know them. I felt like a role play was necessary to really help them understand the reason for the card activity. I explained that if I were meeting a new friend it would look like this—I proceeded to role play a getting-to-know-you example where I asked a friend some questions and she answered. My new friend then asked me questions and I answered. I explained that the cards were a way of doing that quickly because there are 30 of them and only one of me. I then role played what would happen if I gave the same three answers to every question my new friend asked. This had them giggling, but the point was made, and they agreed to write three new things they wanted me to know about them on the front of the card and one struggle on the back of the card. I also reminded them that their name on the card was super important.

For this week’s activity, I purchased two apples, a tube of toothpaste, paper plates, and a toothpick. Prior to the activity, I deliberately bruised one of the apples without leaving a mark on the outside. I showed them the apples and I asked them how apples were like humans. The answers varied from having skin, having a core, having flesh, being different colors, being different shapes, having different tastes, etc. I told them that just like words can damage and hurt us, words can damage an apple. I then asked them to say mean and hurtful things to the apple. In each class I asked one student to use toothpaste to show how hurtful the statements were—for really hurtful statements, a big dollop of toothpaste on the plate, and for less hurtful statements, a smaller dollop of toothpaste on the plate.

The fifth grade focused on the apple itself. It was an ugly color of red, it was fat on the top and skinny on the bottom, it was mushy on the inside or too crisp, it was sour, it had seeds, it had a sticker.

The sixth grade took this to a new level that honestly broke my heart. The apple was ugly, worthless, stupid, nobody likes him, he should die in a hole and it is funny because I know they love me and don’t want me to die.” I explained that while it is true, sometimes hurtful things are hurtful because of who is saying them, that it is important to treat yourself with respect and dignity. If you allow friends to say these types of things, and someone who is not your friend hears you laughing, you have now taught them that it is acceptable to say it. Perhaps they are also trying to be your friend.

The sixth-grade discussion was amazing and thought provoking. Once the discussions were winding down, I handed a toothpick to the toothpaste students and told them that I would need them to please put all of the toothpaste back into the tube using the toothpick. The room was absolutely silent. I waited and watched the reaction. They all said, “That’s impossible” “It can’t be done,” but one student said, “I can’t do that for you. Once the words are said they can’t be taken back.” This lesson took 45 minutes, and the teachers didn’t care because the impact in the room was felt by everyone.

My Insights from Week 3
I cried on my way to work today. I cried about the lesson and the horrible things being said, and I cried for our children who lack self-esteem.
How does that happen? How did we get here? Has it always been like this? I tried to remember my time in those grades, and while I do feel like kids were cruel, I really feel that students today are more cruel. There is a level of disconnect and isolation that is scary. I went home and asked my own kids to remember that words like that could be the last straw for a child with no support and no hope. This week, I feel strongly that Future Ready with the Library only works if students are able to see a future. They can only do that if they are able to see themselves. How do I help them? What is my role? The index cards were better this week with students opening up and sharing both fun facts and struggles. The struggles were still very school related and a big one this week was bullying.

**Week 4**

This week my focus was on identifying individual strengths and working as a team. I passed out index cards and waited. This process is getting shorter each week because they already know what they want to write down.

I began with a discussion about some of my own weaknesses and strengths. I’m short. I have strong legs. When I was in high school, I was trusted to be the top because I was too big, but my role was important, without me there would be no support and no hope. This week, I emphasized that they would need to work together and that sometimes the obvious leader doesn’t have the right strength to get them across.

I then sat back and watched as they struggled.

Teamwork is such a fascinating concept. There were the obvious leaders who thought they could just boss their way across, and they failed. There were the clowns who tried sliding only to find themselves alone. There were the students who preferred to not engage, they quietly watched their group. I emphasized that they would need to cross as a team leaving no one behind.

As I watched, I noticed a group struggling more than the others. A small, quiet girl had pulled away from the group with tears in her eyes. I quietly approached the group and asked what was going on. The group “leader” expressed that the girl wasn’t participating. I asked the “leader” to tell me why the girl was crying, to which she replied, “How would I know, she doesn’t ever talk!” I glanced over and saw those sad eyes grow even sadder at the comment, and I said quietly, “So her strength isn’t talking…what is it?” Her paper plate said that she was a creative artist. The “leader” grew even more frustrated saying, “How will that help?” I leaned closer to the small girl and asked her if she had an idea about the problem. She shook her head and said, “no,” so I helped her with a solution.

I stepped back as her team gathered around her and started talking to her about a solution. She used the paper plates to show them the idea. The team decided to try it, and they laid down the plates and one by one stood on them. Then with her on the lead plate, the second (the “leader”) in line stepped from her plate to the lead plate holding onto the small girl as they shared the space moving everyone up a plate. The end person picked up the plate and passed it to the front and they all moved again. This team crossed the gym six times while they waited for the other teams to get the hang of it. At the end of the activity, I asked what they had learned and was surprised when “the leader” spoke up and said sometimes you don’t have to say anything at all to be a leader. They all learned the power of valuing their own strengths and the strengths of others.

**My Insights from Week 4**

The index cards were amazing this week. So many insights into what is making these children tick. So many small statements about wanting to be accepted and loved. So many confessions about behavior they weren’t proud of. The breakthrough this week happened with the struggles. So many struggles on the cards from mean step-parents to sibling rivalry to thoughts about feeling hopeless. These were hard for me because I’m not in a position to help, and yet sometimes just writing it down lessens the burden. One thing that I did differently this week was respond to the struggles of each child with something positive, a message that they mattered, a reminder that I valued them and why. I have been keeping notes on each student, their likes, their dislikes, the things they share, so I used that to give them a positive message. The reaction was priceless.

**Week 5**

The teachers asked specifically for this week’s focus to be on bullying. I had mixed feelings about the topic going into the classroom. The bullying is so different in the boys and girls. I went in with an idea of the activities that I was going to do and during the time that the students were writing on their index cards, I discarded all my plans and went a different direction. We started by defining bullying. I asked them what it looked like, what it felt like, who was a bully, who had been...
I feel strongly that Future Ready with the Library only works if students are able to see a future. They can only do that if they are able to see themselves.

My Insights from Week 5
I’m loving the index cards! I really feel like they connect me to the students and this helps lead the direction of the next weeks’ discussions. I feel like they have also helped me to identify students who are struggling more than others, feeling isolated, hopeless, and in need of some positivity. I’ve used the cards several times to choose what questions to ask, how to ask them, and to bring up ideas that start bigger conversations. I’m feeling frustrated this week though. Originally, I was supposed to be in the classroom every week until the summer break. Today, the principal told me we would be taking a break during their state testing—a four-week break. I feel like any ground that I have gained will be lost with a break. I didn’t argue the situation simply because I’m using it to inform the actual project, so I will determine in four weeks what was lost.

My Insights from Week 6
The break was detrimental to our progress. The index cards were basically the same as Week 1. I spoke with the principal today and expressed this. He agreed and told me that the teachers had also noticed an effect in their classrooms. I told him I felt that this needed to be taught every week—rain or shine.

During the break, I was approached by a local National Monument with extra money to spend for the education of Native American preteen girls. I excitedly told him about the Future
Ready with the Library project, and we planned an activity on self-esteem, positive self-talk, and dealing with difficult people, difficult situations, and bullying. I shared this with the principal, and we talked about the idea of having a few of our lessons be just for the boys and a few just for the girls. I am also going to partner with the local girls home to bring a few of them over to share their stories with the girls. I think the biggest partnership idea that I made during this break from the classroom is with the local high school. I know it is still the school, but there is a major disconnect in our community. I pitched the idea of possibly creating a mentoring project, and it was well received. We are still working out the details.

The school feels that there should be a mentoring class that students sign up for. I feel that doing that defeats the purpose. Students who sign up for mentoring are probably ones who already feel that they have something to offer. They are students with good grades, talents, popularity, etc. I want this program to have an impact for everyone. If a student who has always felt bad about themselves, doesn’t feel like a leader, doesn’t feel like they have anything to offer, doesn’t get the best grades, etc. comes to the elementary school and is asked to find lonely students on the playground or at lunch and then make a difference, they are empowered. They feel needed. They are giving something that is much needed to our little elementary students, and at the same time they are taking a much needed dose of self-esteem. It’s almost such a big idea that it is overwhelming.

I feel strongly that the core of today’s social and emotional growth begins with the disconnect and what better way to create connection? Students can’t begin to imagine their futures when they are feeling so alone, so isolated, and so hopeless. Future Ready in my little part of the world begins with the basics of self-love, kindness, and connection to others.

AMANDA BUNDY is the Education Director of the Kaibab Paiute Tribal Library; Fredonia, Arizona. She is also a member of the second cohort of the YALSA IMLS-funded Future Ready with the Library project.
Welcome to Research Roundup. The purpose of this recurring column is to make the vast amount of research related to youth and families accessible to you. To match the theme of the winter issue, this column focuses on social emotional learning (SEL). It provides a current definition of SEL, an overview of the various frameworks developed to promote SEL, and a critique of these models specifically within the context of equity. This column concludes by highlighting promising research that can help to frame equity-based SEL in out-of-school time services.

Definition
Because there is a wide range of frameworks and models available, it is difficult to find a single definition of SEL. One definition used frequently is: “Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” Social and emotional learning is also sometimes described as or included as part of developing 21st century skills, soft skills, character education, experiential learning, and positive youth development.

Overview of SEL Frameworks
There are three primary types of SEL frameworks currently used and continuously under development in the United States. The models that are largest and most familiar include research, curricula, and best practices, for example:

• ACT: Achieve, Connect and Thrive
• CASEL
• The CLOVER Model
• MHA Labs 21st Century Skills
There are frameworks that are smaller in scope but highlight some of the gaps in the larger models by focusing on youth’s cultural identities and communities. These include:

• Circle of Courage
• E3: Educational Strengths Assessment Tool
• Ways of Being

Finally, one framework brings together common aspects of the larger models and ties those concepts to youth program quality indicators and out-of-school time programs:

• Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices in Social Emotional Learning
Successes and Critiques
Research shows that focusing on SEL in schools and out-of-school time programs and services led to measurable increases in academic achievement and employability, with decreases in antisocial behaviors and mental health issues.\textsuperscript{11} Research also shows that a focus on SEL can be effective in out-of-school time programs and services.\textsuperscript{12}

Although many SEL frameworks stress empathy, community, and caring, critics argue that the stress on individual youth developing specific identified competencies continues to highlight individualistic models of the self and neglects competencies developed by youth who are constantly navigating structural inequities and institutional racism.\textsuperscript{13}

Both CASEL and MHA Labs have taken this critique seriously. MHA Labs redefined and rewrote some of its basic skills to reduce ambiguity and explicitly reduce bias. For example, instead of using the word “articulate” to define verbal communication skills, MHA Labs explicitly defined verbal communications skills as “Uses and adjusts communication strategies as needed based on the purpose of the message, context, and audience.”\textsuperscript{14}

CASEL developed the “Collaborating Districts Initiative” and established a SEL and Equity Working Group. Key insights from the Collaborating Districts Initiative include: adult social and emotional learning matters a lot, and successful implementation can take many paths as long as there is commitment from staff and leadership.\textsuperscript{15} The SEL and Equity Working Group is developing equity elaborations for all the aspects of social and emotional learning identified by CASEL. These elaborations reflect an appreciation of the root causes of inequities (structural and internalized oppression) and a pursuit of equity outcomes.\textsuperscript{16}

Researchers and practitioners are pursuing exciting and collaborative work in the field of social and emotional learning. Taking time to review the various frameworks and finding out what models are in use in schools and organizations in your area will be valuable for your work within the library and with community partners. The current work addressing critiques of the SEL frameworks is important for libraries to pay attention to in efforts to improve understanding of equity in work with and for youth.

References
11. Ibid.
In July, State Library Agencies (SLAs) were invited by YALSA to apply for the pilot cohort of the Transforming Teen Services: A Train the Trainer Approach (now known as T3) IMLS grant funded initiative. A joint project of YALSA and the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, T3 continues the work of the 2018 National Forum on Transforming Teen Services Through Continuing Education by training SLA staff and public library staff to facilitate workshops on implementing coding and computational thinking programming through the lens of connected learning.

Danielle Margarida (DM), Youth Services Coordinator at the Rhode Island Office of Library and Information Services, and Rebecca Ott (RO), Young Adult Librarian at the Tiverton Public Library in Tiverton, Rhode Island, threw their hat in the ring and were thrilled when Rhode Island was accepted as one of five states participating in the pilot. As a team, Danielle and Rebecca attended the first T3 meeting in Chicago during the first weekend in October 2018 with an outstanding group of professionals from Alabama, Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The weekend consisted of activities that were both challenging and fruitful. The cohort spent time working on issues of identity and equity, connected learning, facilitation skills, and ways in which to help colleagues recognize and integrate connected learning into services for and with teens.

YALSA: Why did you want to be part of the T3 pilot cohort?

DM: We wanted to be part of this project at the ground level. T3 will eventually be expanded nationwide, but as a pilot state it’s an exciting opportunity to help inform and drive the overall implementation of the project. Rhode Island is unique in its size and library community, so we have a lot to offer. We’re looking forward to trying new things and seeing how our experience and outcomes can help other states who join T3 in the second year of the project.

RO: We felt like we would be able to approach this project in a way that no other state can—simply due to our size! Rhode Island is structured so that there are monthly professional development opportunities for our youth services providers in the form of roundtables, working groups, and continuing education. Our state’s size allows us to hold centralized or traveling meetings that allow professionals to have professional development opportunities within a 30 minute or less drive from home or library. In theory (and in an ideal world), we could hold a centralized training and train all of Rhode Island’s youth services providers in one day without any geographic barriers to attendance. Due to the connectivity in our state, we are also in a unique position to reach out to community partners and stakeholders in the area of connected learning. We have opportunities to reach out and train school librarians, after-school providers, children’s librarians, adult services librarians who work with teens. Our geographic size allows for our reach to be wide and our impact to be potentially very deep!

YALSA: What did you expect going into the first T3 meeting?

RO: As learners, this training was interesting because we initially didn’t
We know what to expect! Yes, we had been provided with an itinerary. Yes, we knew the other states that would be joining us that weekend. But entering a new learning space with other new learners, we were unsure about how being involved in the pilot was going to play out.

**DM:** Last fall I participated in a meeting for the YALSA/COSLA IMLS-funded project National Forum on Transforming Teen Services Through Continuing Education. This meeting was incredibly valuable to my work and the larger discussion of teen services, so I went into T3 knowing that wherever YALSA was going to lead us, it was going to be good.

**YALSA:** What did you think about participating in the pilot with states that seem so different from Rhode Island?

**RO:** We could not have been paired up with a more excited, engaged, and forward-thinking group of librarians to work with. It was interesting to hear about how professional training is done state-to-state and how different states have incredibly different issues to tackle all the while doing the same work. Maine was concerned with their aging population and how physically accessing the northern part of the state provides logistical difficulties. Alabama discussed issues of equity of services across town/county lines and how transportation is also an issue. Minnesota was looking into how they were going to include community partnerships with school librarians and after-school programs into their service. And Wisconsin is undergoing a Public Library System Redesign Project that has a goal of developing and implementing a new model of library service to provide the public with the best public library system services possible.

**DM:** The Youth Services Coordinators at the State Library Agencies communicate often on activities, successes, and challenges. What we don’t often get to do is work together on a common project, so this was an exciting opportunity to dig into what is happening in libraries around the country and think about how I can bring that knowledge back to Rhode Island. A big part of my takeaway from our meeting revolves around how to use what is happening in other states to inform our implementation of the T3 project. I’m also thinking of ways that Rhode Island can model some best practices that may be of help to our T3 colleagues.

**RO:** As different as we are state to state, it was professionally reassuring to see that we are all still dealing with some of the same things nationwide: Access to services, materials, and knowledge for our teen patrons. Encouraging a population of users to come to the library and feel safe when they aren’t always treated as a desirable patron pool. And wanting to provide safe spaces for teens to learn, grow, make, and take any and all knowledge and skills that they encounter on any visit to our buildings as possible.

**YALSA:** What are the next steps?

**RO:** We are excited to integrate both connected learning and computational thinking into our upcoming continuing education programs and roundtable discussions. And we are excited to see how other states approach their training modules. Rhode Island is a special little case study for this overall program, and we hope to have a deep impact on our community so that our colleagues can be successful in utilizing the skills taught by this program at our 71 public libraries statewide!

**DM:** We’ve already begun planning and scheduling workshops! Rebecca led a connected learning workshop for staff at her library, and I led my SLA colleagues through a facilitation workshop. In February, Rebecca and I will lead a day-long workshop on connected learning for teen services librarians as part of our Young Adult Roundtable meetings. We’re also planning a child development workshop for April. We can’t wait to report back, so stay tuned!
Libraries Ready to Code: Past, Present, and Future

It’s likely that over the past year you’ve heard something about the Google sponsored Libraries Ready to Code initiative (RtC). You, or someone you know, might have received funding in 2018 to facilitate activities that foster computational thinking (CT) literacies among youth. Or, maybe you attended the RtC session at the 2018 YALSA Symposium in Salt Lake City. Whether you’ve been following the story arc of RtC or have heard about it in passing, as the initiative shifts focus from exploration and discovery to resolving questions about sustaining the momentum and development of resources and learning opportunities, now is the time for engaging the broader library and out-of-school time communities.

How the Libraries Ready to Code initiative is increasing opportunities for youth.

Through a variety of computational thinking literacy-based activities, library staff help youth explore identity, understand their community, pursue passions, and investigate careers.

A Brief Recap of the RtC Initiative

Over the last three years the ALA Washington office worked with Google’s engEDU department to learn (1) about the role school and public libraries have in increasing awareness of and access to CS opportunities for children and youth specifically through coding activities; (2) how school and public libraries can design youth programs that foster CT literacies; and (3) what skills, dispositions, support, and resources library staff need to build capacity to undertake this work. We did this over three phases, including an environmental scan of libraries and computer science...
activities, work with six library school faculty who integrated CT into their syllabi, and building a community of practice among 30 cohort libraries who facilitated CT activities in their libraries and communities throughout 2018. All of the work together led to the launch of the Libraries Ready to Code Collection (http://libraries-readytocode.org) in late 2018.

### Ready to Code Today

Now the initiative is at a pivotal point as we increase our effort to engage the broader library community. In 2018 the three ALA youth divisions—YALSA, ALSC, and AASL—launched a task force to consider how individually and collectively the work of RtC could be sustained, which includes finding a permanent home within ALA. The task force is led by Dr. Mega Subramaniam (Associate Professor at the University of Maryland iSchool and RtC Fellow for the ALA Washington office. YALSA Task Force members are Megan Burton, Kitsap (Washington) Regional Library, and Ryan Moniz, Markham (Ontario) Public Library (the complete list of members and the charge can be found on the District Dispatch site - https://www.districtdispatch.org/2018/06/readytocode-whats-next/).

Working in pairs on strategies relevant to each division’s own priorities, task force members are grappling with these questions:

- In what ways does the RtC work align or support division priorities or existing initiatives?
- What role could the divisions play in helping the work move forward?
- What challenges are you aware of related to this work in schools and public libraries?

The task force will also embark on a group plan that includes developing a communications plan and related materials for use by the three youth divisions. Task force members will also provide input on a set of case studies based on the previous work of the 30 RtC cohort libraries. They will also help develop materials that the ALA Washington office can use for advocacy work with national decision-makers.

### What You Can Expect in 2019

During CS Education Week in 2018 (December 3–9, 2018), 250 libraries participated in RtC by incorporating a Google CS First activity into coding programs. Each library that submitted a recap of their activity received $500 to further seed ideas for ongoing CT literacy and coding engagement and capacity building. A review committee selected ten libraries that exhibit promising practices, connecting their work to the RtC themes.

In the near future you will learn more from the RtC task force. RtC cohort libraries are taking charge and presenting at state conferences and submitting proposals to many more. Look for one where you are. And don’t forget to check out the website!

### What Is Computational Thinking?

Computational thinking (CT) refers to thought processes used to formulate problems and their solutions. These include breaking down problems into smaller parts, looking for patterns, identifying principles that generate these patterns, and developing instructions the computers—machines and people—can understand. It is an approach to critical thinking that can be used to solve problems across all disciplines.

### References


### What Is CS First?

CS First are free, easy-to-use activities and curricula to introduce students ages 9–14 to computer science through themed projects that attract students with varied interests. Instructional videos guide students through each activity, so no coding experience is needed to teach.

### Reference

Reading Between the Lines of Social and Emotional Learning

Discover what SEL is all about and why it’s important to consider when designing and implementing teen services.

Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a natural process that all people experience as a part of their development. We all learn to be aware of who we are and who we want to be in the world, navigate relationships, make good decisions, and communicate effectively with others. SEL is a process that may happen on its own, but over the last two decades, SEL has been recognized as a formal component of a young person’s educational experience in schools and in informal learning environments. In K–12 education, concepts related to SEL (e.g., student engagement, whole child development) have been elevated through education legislation, and there has been an increase in adoption of SEL state standards and competencies across the country. It appears that educators are endeavoring to integrate SEL into school-day instructional practices and that we are experiencing a shift (back) in thinking about the role of the school and the K–12 educator. Not surprisingly, informal learning environments—those that provide safe spaces and are dedicated to creativity, agency, choice, and relationships—are also emerging as ideal settings to promote SEL. In this article, we define and describe the SEL landscape and describe the role of libraries and library staff in the SEL movement. It is our hope that library staff can use SEL as a framework in planning work or to better advocate for the services they already provide.

What Is SEL?

SEL is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” In this widely accepted definition, we distinguish between (1) the process of social and emotional learning, (2) the approaches and practices that support effective SEL, and (3) the knowledge, attitudes, and skills (commonly referred to collectively as competencies) that students and adults will develop and apply as a result. There are many frameworks that articulate social and emotional competencies that may develop because of effective SEL. CASEL has identified five competency domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

• Self-awareness includes recognizing one’s emotions, strengths and limitations, and values.
• Self-management includes regulating emotions and behaviors, perseverance, and the ability to set and work toward goals.
• Social awareness includes taking the perspective of and empathizing with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, appreciating and respecting differences, and recognizing the emotions of others.
• Relationship skills include effective communication, active listening, collaborating, and establishing and maintaining healthy relationships.
• Responsible decision-making includes making constructive choices across varied situations.6 Research suggests that comprehensive SEL that focuses on developing a broad array of critical competencies (as opposed to singularly focusing on one or two specific skills) may yield a variety of benefits.7

Benefits of SEL
Effective SEL has the potential to yield a variety of outcomes, revealing what may work best in both school and out-of-school time settings. Research suggests that when youth engage in SEL, they are more likely to demonstrate better social and emotional competencies—they may behave better in the classroom, engage in healthy relationships, experience less emotional distress, and/or exhibit reduced levels of conduct problems.8 New studies have also begun to shed light on the longer-term benefits of SEL for adults who participated in SEL in early childhood: engagement in healthy adult relationships, less engagement in criminal behavior, and higher levels of engaged citizenship.9

SEL Is for Everyone, Everywhere
The basic premise of SEL is that it is for everyone (i.e., “universal”), designed to support the development of all youth. (SEL may also be used in a more-targeted approach, either as an early intervention or treatment in response to youth who demonstrate need, however, that is beyond the scope of this article.) When applied universally to all youth, it is important to remember that the process of SEL and the resulting competencies that youth develop can—and should—look different for different youth or in different settings. Effective SEL must therefore always be contextually relevant and culturally sensitive and responsive to the assets and needs of the youth who are engaged in the process.

Social and emotional competencies do not develop in isolation. Rather, we develop them through our experiences in different contexts and systems, relationships, and institutional practices. Understanding the youth we are serving and the unique assets they bring with them is critical to ensuring that we adopt and implement SEL practices that are not only safe and supportive but also run counter to marginalization while supporting equity.10

Given the universal nature of SEL that we have described—that it is for everyone and that we are all different—it follows that social and emotional development can be supported using different approaches. Four common methods include: (1) explicit skills instruction, typically through free-standing lessons; (2) SEL-focused teaching practices; (3) integrated SEL with academic subject matter and other content areas; and (4) adopting system-wide practices that create a climate and culture that supports social, emotional, and academic learning.11

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is often the combination of multiple methods to meet the needs of a diverse group that works best. It is also important to consider which approach is developmentally appropriate and relevant for the group of youth you are engaging with. For example, explicit skills instruction is often more commonly employed when developing foundational skills with younger children, however, for adolescents this approach may be less effective.12 When working with adolescents, focusing on creating a safe, supportive, and respectful climate while emphasizing relevant mindsets may be a more effective strategy.13

One key to effective SEL—regardless of the approach(es) you may choose—is that SEL is embedded within multiple settings, from classrooms and schools, to homes, and around the community. Libraries can be an ideal setting to support and reinforce social and emotional development, by creating a climate and culture that fosters SEL while engaging in competence-building practices and activities.

SEL Thrives in a Climate and Culture That Is Safe and Supportive
Research suggests that young people need to feel safe and supported—both physically and emotionally, by adults and their peers—if they are to engage in learning.14 Any kind of learning (academic, social, emotional, or otherwise) can be a sensitive and vulnerable experience that necessitates productive risk-taking and the willingness to make mistakes. Adults can engage in practices to ensure that such foundational elements as physical and emotional safety, sense of belonging, and relationships are supported to create a positive climate conducive to skill development.15

For youth to learn, they first need to feel safe. Physical safety is foundational and includes protections against threats of violence, exposure to weapons, and toxic or otherwise harmful substances. Emotional safety is equally important, referring to one’s sense of security in feeling and expressing emotions, confidence to take productive risks and engage in challenges, protection from bullying and emotional abuse. It is important to consider the effects (and potentially unintended consequences) of practices that support physical safety and emotional safety to ensure they are not at odds with each other. Ensuring practices are contex-

...
and we know from research that individuals who feel like they belong often behave differently than those who do not. Youth who experience belonging perceive themselves to be more competent and autonomous and are more intrinsically motivated. Youth who feel like they belong have a strong sense of identity, are more engaged, and generally perform better. They have positive attitudes toward school, adults, and peers, and they participate in school and out-of-school activities. They are more invested and better able to engage in the learning process. Youth who do not experience that sense of belonging—youth who experience rejection or exclusion—are more likely to exhibit behavioral issues like aggression, defiance. They’re less engaged, less confident, less motivated. School and community-based libraries offer another place where young people can convene and feel both physically safe and also find a sense of belonging.

A critical lever for people to develop a sense of belonging is having positive relationships. Not surprisingly, research suggests that relationships between adults and youth are critical to youth social, emotional, and academic success. When adults engage with youth in a caring and connected way, they create an environment where youth feel safe and supported and like they belong. This gives youth the confidence and freedom to develop new competencies, which we discuss in the next section. Informal learning settings like libraries provide flexibility and opportunities for informal conversation between young people and adults who can bolster adult-youth relationships.

When young people enter adolescence, they are developmentally ready to practice being independent, seek out new experiences, and to take risks. Social and emotional competencies help teens navigate the adolescent terrain of newness and autonomy, and (healthy) newness and autonomy in turn fosters agency and helps youth develop new competencies. This stage of development can be hard to support in structured environments where sameness and conformity is often the norm. It can also be hard to create environments where teens can engage independently in new experiences when adults may not know how or be able to shift the balance of power to young people. This phenomenon (sometimes called “adultism”) can be a hindrance to supporting adolescent development across settings, however, we posit that it may be less likely in informal learning environments where development and exploration are central to the mission of the setting. Libraries can be an ideal place for young adolescents to explore the aspects of their world that they are interested in, make independent choices, and engage in relationships with adults who can help them navigate their development without a formal stake in the outcomes (i.e., schools and teachers).

**SEL Fosters the Development of Critical Competencies**

When youth can spend time in a safe and supportive space, they have the opportunity to develop critical social and emotional competencies. In fact, the type of environment described previously—one that fosters belonging, enables healthy relationships, and allows for youth autonomy and engagement—not only allows for skill development, it encourages it.

Research suggests that skill building must be intentional, designed with SAFE principles in mind. SAFE skill building is sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. An intentional process to support skill building must be structured so that activities are coordinated, building on each other with supports from staff to scaffold and support prior knowledge and skill development. Learning must also be active—hands-on, engaging, relevant to the “real world” and applicable to youth—and focused so that there is dedicated time to focus on social and emotional skill development. Finally, skill-building activities should be explicit in that they target specific skills clearly, with learning goals in mind. As described previously, there are different approaches to SEL, and determining which competencies to emphasize and how to do that will depend largely on the population of youth served and the setting and structures in which you are able to focus on SEL. Regardless of whether you choose to approach SEL using a direct skill instruction approach or if you choose to embed SEL practices into already-existing structures, SAFE principles are critical.

As youth engage in the process of SEL, it is critical that they have the opportunity to practice new skills (the A for “active” in SAFE) and to receive feedback. Newman and colleagues describe a modeling–practicing–feedback loop that describes how SEL may be explicitly emphasized while concurrently being embedded in the day-to-day. “In this loop, adults model social and emotional competencies and provide opportunities for students to practice using them (either by explicitly naming them, demonstrating them, and role-playing use of them, or by creating embedded opportunities for real-life modeling and practice such as through community service). Adults (and peers, if developmentally appropriate) can then give feedback and engage in coaching as students work to develop and master the competency.”

Intentional modeling, described in the loop, is an effective way to support youth competence development, however, it is important to remember that adults are always modeling competence (or lack thereof), whether
they mean to or not. Adult behaviors are always on display, and youth are watching and learning. As such, it is essential to support the social and emotional health and well-being of adults as well. Taking time to reflect on your personal competencies and skills, your biases, and what you “bring to the table” can be an effective mechanism for improving your SEL practice.

In addition to ensuring learning is active, it is also important to promote youth motivation and engagement. Active learning strategies are important, however, research also suggests that it is beneficial to emphasize personal connections to learning.26 Making the learning opportunities personal and relevant not only serves to promote engagement, it can help to ensure that these opportunities are contextually relevant, culturally competent, and authentic. Authentic SEL also affords the opportunity for youth to share their voice, make their own choices, describe their own experiences, and build relationships with others.27

**SEL Strategies in the Library (or, Best People Practice)**

In consideration of the information presented here—that SEL is for everyone, that there are multiple methods for engaging in SEL, that SEL thrives in a safe and supportive space, and that young people can develop competencies when skill building is done in an intentional way—we highlight research-informed SEL strategies that may work well when implemented in the library. Reading between the lines here, our position is that SEL is not new; nor are the strategies that support SEL. Many of these strategies may already be in place in your library as your standard “best people practice,” so SEL may already be happening. Relationships are not new. Reflection is not new. Choice and exploration are not new. What may be new and, ultimately, most critical is that SEL practices are implemented with intentionality, making them more likely to be accessible to all young people. The list of practices and strategies included here is not exhaustive, rather it is intended to serve an illustrative (and inspirational) purpose.

**Think about the youth, their families, and members of the community who visit your library.** Consider whether and how they are represented within the space and in the ways you approach SEL. Ask yourself: What do they need from your library? Or, better yet, ask them what they want. Does your space reflect the assets and values of the local community?

**Design the library space to feel warm, welcoming, and inviting for all youth.**

Are there varied spaces (or times, if space is tight) for youth to convene, explore their interests, and engage in relationships? Does it feel emotionally safe for youth to come and stay, to “hang out” and freely navigate the library resources?

**Coordinate with schools and districts, other community-based organizations, and engage families.**

Just as you may work to understand the literature and concepts students study in school, work to learn and align with the social and emotional supports schools and other local out-of-school time programs are providing or need.

**Consider how youth make choices during their time at the library and identify ways to support their decision-making skills.**

Youth make choices about the resources they select, for example, they may also choose to attend activities held by the library or participate in library-supported projects. When youth are at the library, they may be choosing their next adventure, working on a school project, making choices about topics for a report or a project—engage in conversation around those choices, including how and why they made the decisions they did. Support youth in intentional decision-making and understanding the effects of those choices.

**Afford young people the opportunity to take on responsibility and then support them as they learn and improve those skills.**

Consider how youth are responsible for the shared space of the library. Libraries have common norms for behavior, and part of being responsible is learning a local norm and deciding how to adopt the norm and even to become a contributor to that shared environment with norms. If possible (for example, if there is a youth space or designated time in the library), encourage regular youth visitors to define the shared norms and responsibilities of the space or time, and ask them how to communicate those norms with their peers. This shared responsibility for defining norms fosters responsibility and also fosters a shared sense of belonging (including naming of the space and time, if possible).

Libraries are also an excellent setting to be responsible for something. You use or take out a book or resource, you have to take care of it while it is in your possession, and you have to return materials when you are done. This goes without saying, but there is more to the narrative. Libraries offer a shared space for many in the community, which means all patrons need to treat it with respect. Talk to young people about the different ways in which they can practice responsibility during their visit and while they are using library materials.

**Share (and discuss) resources that embed SEL.**

Connect teens to materials about making choices, good decision-making,
or being responsible. Promote the development of empathy by talking with youth to consider the details of the resource and what they would do if they were in the same situation. Encourage perspective taking and foster communication about these concepts by engaging youth in small group discussions or partnered reading opportunities.28

Engage youth in mindful reading and engagement practices.

Encourage youth to find time for engaging with reading and learning where they can truly focus as opposed to trying to fit it in here and there or because they have to. Ask youth to focus their attention as they engage with content and learning and to notice when and where their mind wanders while encouraging them to bring their mind back to the engagement activity. All of these practices help youth to slow down and engage more deeply in experience.

Summary

Social and emotional learning is a natural process that is increasingly recognized (and supported with evidence) as something adults can facilitate for all young people. SEL has taken hold in traditional educational settings, and we posit that informal learning environments like libraries are ideal settings for SEL as well. When staff regularly practice strategies that enable SEL in safe places that are often reflective of the assets and values of the community, SEL can thrive. Although not widely studied, there are research-based strategies that have been effective in other similar informal learning settings. The strategies described here are ideal for library staff who aim to intentionally foster SEL. Libraries have the potential to provide a supportive environment where young people can have a sense of belonging, form positive relationships, foster choice, and promote responsibility. Library programs can offer reflective opportunities on important skills like empathy and ways to practice mindfulness, and to connect with the local community. We started this article with a deep dive into the research on effective SEL practice. We end with the hope that libraries take an active role in supporting young people’s SEL and that we can return to this conversation with evidence on proven strategies for SEL in libraries in the future.

References


13. Ibid.


JESSICA NEWMAN is a senior researcher at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) focused on promoting positive youth development in and out of school. Her work focuses on the practices that promote social and emotional learning and youth development, with an emphasis on out-of-school time programming.

DEBORAH MORONEY is a managing director at AIR. Dr. Moroney’s research and practice experience is in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), social and emotional learning, and youth development in afterschool and expanded learning settings.
Kathleen Houlihan

5 Ways to Incorporate SEL at Your Library: Supporting Multi-dimensional Learning

Take time to look at how your library’s teen services align to SEL facets.

If you’re confused about how to get started incorporating social emotional learning (SEL) into your teen programming, you are not alone. Learning about best practices for educators can be daunting, and it’s intimidating to feel like you’re responsible for incorporating so many layers of learning into teen programs. At the Austin Public Library’s Teen Central, we are just getting started with blending SEL into our program and service delivery model, thankfully, we’re finding that many of the things libraries do already support SEL. The tips in this article are not meant to be a blueprint for complete implementation of SEL. Instead, I hope to provide a few of our initial steps to inspire you to create your own SEL implementation, and that might serve as a ladder to further integration of SEL into programs and services at your library.

By the end of this article, you should have a practical grasp of applications for SEL, be able to describe SEL outcomes to stakeholders, explain why SEL outcomes matter, and jump in with some accessible ways to start making progress toward complete SEL assimilation.

1: Describe Program Outcomes to Adults Using SEL

One of the easiest ways we found to translate SEL to library work was to start to use it to describe the outcomes of our programs to adult stakeholders. By analyzing our existing programming and services through the SEL lens, we started to see where our SEL programming strengths lay, and what areas needed more intentional development. If you try this translation exercise, you’ll probably find that many of your programs support loads of social emotional learning that you weren’t even aware of. Being able to articulate that learning is an effective (and easy!) way to demonstrate the outcomes of library programs.

One way to get started is to use a grid to plot out what SEL skills are supported for each program you are currently offering. Once you’ve done that, try turning that grid into a series of statements about the takeaway for teens who attended the specific program.

Figure 1 below is an example of a grid we completed for a couple of programs we’ve done recently. One was called “Sewing After Dark” (your basic drop-in sewing machine lab), and the other was an HTML/CSS/Java coding workshop for beginners. In the grid I’ve taken each program and highlighted in bold the SEL facets that the program supported. Next, in Figure 2, I’ve taken those SEL components and mapped them to the YALSA “Teens First: Basic Learning Outcomes” (http://bit.ly/yalsa_outcomes), which generated some powerful narrative descriptions of our program’s outcomes.

2: Describe Program Outcomes to Teens Using SEL

What we found at Austin’s Teen Central was that we could also use this SEL mapping to describe newly acquired skills to our teen customers, which fulfilled other SEL goals in the bargain. Teens benefit greatly from knowing what they learned by participating in library programs. It can help them articulate their strengths and skills they have mastered, which is so
Connecting Library Programs to SEL Facets

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Figure 1 Connecting Library Programs to SEL Facets

In Sewing After Dark, Teen Participants...
- Were able to innovate, and think flexibly, as they experimented, took risks, prototyped, and tested ideas.
- Created original work and also used advanced geometrical manipulation and 3D rendering concepts to modify and remix existing designs.
- Displayed increased self-confidence as their creations came together, and showed perseverance as they navigated trickier elements of their project.
- Demonstrated an ability to work well under pressure as the lab drew to a close and projects were wrapped up.
- Mentored others, while respecting others’ opinions.
- Practiced workforce skills including time management, problem solving, resource sharing and allocation, communication skills, and accepting and providing constructive feedback to peers.

Figure 2 In Sewing After Dark, Teen Participants...

important for their future success and also a critical job-seeking skill. Being able to articulate their learning also helps empower teens to explain the value of their participation in activities to parents who may see it as just something “fun” to do and, therefore, something that’s optional, rather than a high priority. While adults are likely to be better educated about the importance of the library for younger children, there’s a disconnect as kids grow into teens. Because we often don’t see the parents of the teens we serve, teens must act as advocates for the value of library programs. Happily, teaching them how to be good library advocates also supports their social emotional learning, and it doesn’t have to be a boring laundry list you read out at the end of each program.

One way that we support SEL at my library is to create a certificate for teens participating in our programs, and on that certificate, we list all the skills they learned as a part of the workshop. We are also at the begin-
skills, as well as any specific skills they gained as part of the program, and then we put those on the certificate. Above is an example from the Sewing After Dark program.

3: Talk About Failure (Yours, Not Theirs)

If you’ve been reading the news lately, you’ll know that youth in the United States have a serious lack of confidence in their abilities. For youth of color, the confidence gap is rooted in systems of oppression; they are so harmed by white supremacy that it has a similar effect on brain development as childhood trauma. For all youth, brain chemistry combined with enormous cultural and societal pressures can be detrimental to confidence levels, requiring regular intervention from a community of caring and committed adults—a community that includes you!

As huge a task as it may seem, there are many things we can do to help teens develop into strong, resilient, empathetic, and successful people. One thing to do is, counterintuitively, to talk about your own failure. Perfectionism has a huge impact on willingness to try new things, and yes, fear of failing. It’s important for adults to model failure, to talk about how we’ve failed in the past, and to talk about how we were persistent (or wish we had been), what the outcome was of the failure, and how we handled that outcome. This kind of modeling trains teens to think about failure as a critical part of learning and growth, rather than something to be avoided. It also helps make the connection between failure and creating new ideas. Instead of fearing failure, hearing adults talk about it legitimizes failure as an acceptable—and more importantly, an embraceable, part of life—one that can be seized and leveraged to create new things, or to reshape ourselves and our thoughts about the world in new ways.

You can add this as an intentional practice to every program you do. Before hosting, as part of your prep work, make a mental note about any struggles you had working through the activity—either in the past, or for this specific program. Think of what the outcome of that struggle was: Did you try again? Did it turn out even better the next time? Did you give up but come back to it years later with success? How did all of that make you feel? As an example, our Youth Technology Librarian, Adrian Perez, recently hosted a multiskill maker program called APL Industries, where teens worked to augment 3D printed items with artistic and electronic flair. While he was planning for this program, Adrian was struggling to also create a 3D scale model of the new Central Library to have ready in time for the library’s first birthday party. He spent hours drafting the design from the blueprints for the building, tweaking and adjusting it to make sure it looked as close to the original as possible. Then the moment of truth came—it was time to print! But every time he tried to print the model, it melted into an unrecognizable puddle of filament goo.

That’s What I Like About You!

• “You have a really welcoming presence”
• “You’re such a great negotiator”
• “Your time management skills are incredible”
• “I really admire your leadership abilities”
• “I wish I had your organizational skills”
• “You are great at collecting people’s stories—that’s a really useful skill”

Figure 3 That’s What I Like About You
While we were shaking our heads over it, we came to the realization that this was a really valuable story that he could tell during our APL Industries program, to model failure, critical thinking, problem solving, tenacity, and time management—all skills that we were hoping to develop in our APL Industries teens.

4: Why You Are Awesome
Hosting library programs (inside or outside the library) is a great way to get to know the teens in your community. And once you’ve gotten to know them, here’s another SEL-supporting activity you can practice with them. Tell the teens you’re working with that they’re awesome. But not just that—tell them why they are awesome. Get specific. Tell them what attribute, trait, or strength you find admirable in them in the moment. Did they stick with a challenging project? Let them know how much you admire their tenacity. Did they reach out to a new person just joining and quickly get them caught up? Let them know the power they have to make a sign about any cause they believe in, whether it supported the walkout or not. They showed amazing leadership, and empathy for differences, that made the space very welcoming to everyone, and demonstrated a wealth of social emotional learning.

We also successfully made the case for hiring teens at our library in paid positions. The teens working with us will not be doing menial work; instead they’ll be placed in leadership positions at the library and will be charged with creating and leading programs for other teens and tweens.

Hiring teens is a multipronged strategy to meet many of our outcome goals; it allows us to support SEL, remove participation barriers for teens who need to earn income to support their families or personal goals, and it can serve as a subversive way to diversify program attendance and reach the teens who would otherwise not participate in library programs due to overly busy schedules. These teens will be paired with a staff mentor who will be their partner for the duration of their employment. They will work as a team to create connected learning opportunities for teens and tweens, and will also receive professional development training in public speaking, communication skills, time management, resource planning, purchasing, marketing, outcomes planning, and a wealth of other skills that will in turn support their own social emotional learning and life goals.

I hope I’ve conveyed how excited we are about the potential for SEL to help our library tell the daily stories of success happening with our teen community here in Austin. It can be challenging to navigate past all the “fun” it looks like we’re having in teen programs (we call this the “f” word!), and help people understand the deep learning that’s going on. SEL gives you the language you need to articulate why your programs matter and why they deserve continued efforts. The skills teens develop at library programs have so much power and potential to give them the tools they need to successfully launch into society as productive, caring, and engaged citizens. SEL helps you become an informed part of the community of adults who will help launch this young generation of world changers.

KATHLEEN HOULIHAN, MSIS, is the Teen Central Manager, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas.
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Building Social Emotional Learning in Youth Through Humanities-Centered Activities

In 2010 the Pennsylvania Humanities Council created Teen Reading Lounge (TRL), an interactive discussion program that uses the humanities to build social emotional learning (SEL) skills in youth. Over the eight years TRL has been out in the field, we’ve worked with over 80 libraries, schools, and community-based organizations across Pennsylvania to engage over 1,000 young people from a variety of backgrounds. The program is built on the belief that the humanities can cultivate curiosity, empathy, critical thinking, social awareness, and perseverance. There are three key steps to building a Teen Reading Lounge experience: featured texts chosen by participating youth; peer-to-peer discussion and dialogue of the themes and issues explored in the readings; and development of hands-on activities and projects to deepen youth’s understanding of the issues brought up in discussion. Projects often incorporate a community engagement or volunteer component as youth begin to connect the readings to issues present in their lives and communities.

The program framework is intentionally simple and flexible. There are no required reading lists or must-do projects. Site staff, local educators, and youth work together to build a curriculum that’s relevant and meaningful to them. Research around positive youth development cites this as a best practice; developing programs in collaboration with youth that meet their developmental needs and interests ensures they’ll stick with the experience longer. That sustained participation can yield higher levels of engagement and stronger outcomes. When we’re talking about building social emotional learning skills, the more time youth get to practice these skills the more likely they are to become a permanent part of behavior. We’re also working with sites and youth to improve the model and share promising strategies. This is done through youth feedback loops and practitioner community of practice calls. A spirit of experimentation and exploration is baked into the model. The reflective nature of the wraparound supports is essential to making the learning stick for both youth and the adults overseeing the program.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL “enhances students’ capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges.” SEL consists of growth in five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Teen Reading Lounge cultivates these competencies by inviting youth to be active participants in their learning and personal development. The humanities are a natural fit for these activities because they invite us to explore the human experience by analyzing circumstances and choices as a way to build knowledge about how we live our lives.

TRL programs have taken place in a variety of settings and deployed a variety of strategies to engage youth in skill development and learning. This too is intentional—and part of what makes the experience unique for each site. As youth workers, all our hand-wringing about sticking to a set agenda, or accomplishing narrowly
defined goals, can fail to give young people the opportunity to be their own leaders. It is the spaces between our agenda items where teens so often shine—making decisions as a group, establishing rules, cooperating, and dealing with conflict. As the following examples demonstrate, expanding these opportunities can be more important than having control of the outcome.

**Growing Empathy at John W. Hallahan Catholic Girls’ High School**

Teen Reading Lounge was developed in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Office of Commonwealth Libraries, and initially all participating program sites were public libraries. But in 2017, PHC expanded the program to include high schools and youth-serving organizations. A small, dedicated group launched at John W. Hallahan Catholic Girls’ High School in Philadelphia that year, led by out-of-school time program coordinator Jo Bradley and language arts teacher Samantha Dugan. One text the group explored was Liliana Velásquez’s *Dreams and Nightmares*, a gripping first-person account of the author’s solo journey from Guatemala to the United States when she was just 14.

Together the girls participated in a series of conversations about the book, which led to them sharing stories of their parents’ immigration experiences. Three of the teens in the group were children of Vietnamese immigrants, and the novel made them acutely aware of their own families’ struggles. One of the young girls remarked that Liliana’s account of her journey to an unfamiliar land made her reflect on her own parents’ journey to the United States. She spoke of building empathy for them, hinting at a growing understanding of the immigrant experience.

The group was fortunate to meet the author in person, an activity facilitated by the dedicated adults overseeing the program. This experience provided a rich learning opportunity for the group as they were able to hear more about Liliana’s story firsthand. They fired off questions to Liliana, eager to better understand the choices she made, how she navigated some life-threatening situations, and what impact the experience had—and still has—on her. The program coordinators were careful not to dictate the questions asked during this Q & A session or control this exchange; it was important for the youth to drive this discussion on their own.

Embracing their creative control, the students’ final project based on Velásquez’s *Dreams and Nightmares* was something novel and unexpected. They applied their religious education to develop a secretly coded Bible for immigrants. This ingeniously covert travel guide gave survival instructions, directions to safe locations, and other life-saving advice. Through discussions and interactions with Liliana, the group was able to tease out some of what the immigrant experience might be like and brainstormed solutions to help individuals navigate unfamiliar and hostile terrain.

This project brought the group closer together while allowing them the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills. The group also explored the concepts of self-management, self-awareness, and social awareness. A graduating senior in the group reflected on the experience saying, “On the news we see adults shouting at each other and getting upset but Teen Reading Lounge gave us a positive example of how you can discuss complicated issues and that has really grown my interest in being a more participative citizen.”

**Processing Tragedy at Priestley Forsyth Memorial Library**

When the Parkland, Florida, school shooting happened last year, Priestley Forsyth Memorial Library in Northumberland, Pennsylvania, was in the midst of reading *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* as their featured Teen Reading Lounge text. The book was selected because of its relatability to the participating youth’s life and developmental stage; many of them were middle schoolers about to transition to high school and were eager to discuss the changing landscapes of their academic and social worlds. Then the Parkland tragedy hit the national media, and the conversations began to take on a sense of urgency about rampant school violence and fears about safety.

Although it was heartbreaking and unexpected to have these conversations, librarian Kim King and local teacher Renee Albertson, who co-facilitated the program, recognized that for youth to talk about Parkland was more important than whatever expectations they had for the program. Kim remarked, “We did not anticipate this discussion, but we knew we had to make space for it so we adapted our plan. It was important to give our group a voice and help them see they could navigate unexpected situations. We all needed time to reflect on what was happening nationally.”

Alice’s journey “down the rabbit hole”—previously viewed as exciting and new—became a mirror for the growing disorientation, fear, and hopelessness teens felt about the Parkland shooting. The shooting had stirred consciousness of their vulnerability, and in this process, these youth revealed a growing disillusionment about their safety. They felt like they had entered a new world where things were more unpredictable. Over the course of the program the youth
discussed these issues in depth and explored some current school safety and disaster planning policies.

As Alice makes her way through Wonderland, she comes in contact with many different characters, including the Queen of Hearts—an arrogant, emotional monarch—whose solution to most problems is “off with his head!” The group used this character as a way to analyze and discuss leadership styles. Using playing cards with different traits, participants chose their top must-have qualities for a leader. Once this was completed, they discussed it as a group making sure all participants had time to share their top traits. The conversation generated around this exercise had two goals: one, get youth to think about what leadership meant to them; and two, to make connections to skills they had or wanted to build on their way to becoming leaders in their own lives. Interestingly, given the context of the discussions about Parkland that preceded the activity, many young people identified “ensuring safety” as an important leadership skill, once again showing that the program opened up a whole new way to process tragedy and consider its effects on how we live our lives.

Exploring Social Awareness at the Free Library of Philadelphia

For several years, the Teen Reading Lounge group at the Philadelphia City Institute branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia has been meeting to discuss an array of books exploring topics such as privilege, equity, power, and social justice. Although some young people have dipped in and out of the program, attendance has been consistent—a rarity for high school-aged youth.

Erin Hoopes, the branch manager and librarian overseeing the program, has taken care to build a comfortable, safe, and welcoming environment for these teens. They come back because they know TRL is a place where they can explore topics they may not be able to unpack in school or at their own dinner tables. To watch Erin facilitate group discussion is a master class in how to connect with young people. She takes the reins when appropriate but also steps back to let the young people practice their facilitation skills. Her questions are always sincere; it’s obvious that she cares about what these young people think. She also recognizes the urgency of the issues with which they are grappling. The youth she works with are at a developmental phase where they are in the process of discovering their values and ideals—a necessary step in forming their identities. However, the media, a prevalent force in these young people’s lives, can undercut this process. This is particularly true for youth of color who aren’t always valued or positively supported by society.

Erin works with a lot of these young people, and it’s important to her to support them. Not only does research suggest that adult role models can have a positive effect on youth development but to her it’s the right thing to do. For Erin, giving youth in her library a space to discuss and analyze the issues that affect their lives is key to building their confidence about themselves and their futures.

As the group grew in membership and maturity, Erin sensed a need for them to take action on some of the issues they were discussing. She introduced the concept of civic engagement to the group and together they built projects exploring education inequities in the Philadelphia school system (the group was made up of youth from schools throughout the city) and gun control.

The process of choosing topics to explore wasn’t easy. Although they often bubbled up out of the book discussions, building consensus around which one to address was challenging. To help the group through the process of shared decision-making and collaboration Erin used a tool called the “Five Stages to Social Action.” Developed by Dr. Valerie Adams-Bass as part of the Freedom Schools curriculum, The five stages walks a group of young people through the process...
When we’re talking about building social emotional learning skills, the more time youth get to practice these skills the more likely they are to become a permanent part of behavior.

of identifying what matters most to them. Questions like “What issues are you concerned about in your community?” and “What do we know or want to know about these issues?” help young people learn more about the causes and effects of societal challenges and do a little bit of fact-checking around their own knowledge and perception of the issues. The tool then carries through these discussions to dreaming big—what can we do about these issues?—and from that, the group creates a project to explore solutions. Erin’s group conducted two major projects: they wrote a blog about their experience with the education system and produced a video exploring the public’s perception of gun violence. In addition to talking through these issues, building knowledge about them and learning about their peers’ perceptions and beliefs, youth also take the reins in creation. In these two cases, they learned how to build and launch a blog as well as produce a video from start to finish. The goal here isn’t to “get it right”—and occasionally a group will overreach or abandon projects they build as a result of the process. Staff are advised not to frame this as a failure but as a valuable learning process that supports the teens’ self-management skills. Erin has talked about how difficult it was not to step in and “save” the project. Instead, she advised and then asked them to reflect on the process, which is where the real learning lies. Participants considered motivation, self-management, teamwork, and patience with all of these projects. In other words, not only did they practice the skills needed to get the project done but in the process explored what it takes to make something successful or not. This is an important life lesson. Tackling complex projects is part of every adult’s life and learning how to set realistic goals takes practice.

Through this process, Erin’s group has built a sense of community and a sense that they can apply solutions to big, complex problems. Her community of teens is now thriving—creating impressive civic engagement projects and putting on events that are making headlines. They recently guest-blogged for YALSA and wrote, “Through TRL, we have become better, more empathetic individuals, and more conscious about the world we live in.” (http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/2018/04/04/empowering-teens-one-conversation-at-a-time/)

The Humanities Have a Place in SEL
One of the most frequently cited benefits of the humanities is improving students’ critical thinking skills, which is closely related to the SEL concept of responsible decision-making, that is, making ethical, informed, and conscientious life choices. Responsible decision-making is hard enough for adults, but for teens struggling through their social and emotional development, it is especially challenging. Teens can be helped to see the potential consequences of their actions by collectively engaging with the humanities through book discussions. This can build a strong foundation for responsible decision-making by exploring multiple perspectives while encouraging self-reflection and dialogue. In the real world practice of facilitating discussions with teens this can be messy, but in a wonderfully rewarding kind of way.

The TRL outcomes we track through surveys and other data collection tell the story that the humanities have a place in SEL. They support the conclusions of a 2017 meta-analysis by CASEL that found SEL to “boost student well-being in the form of greater social and emotional competencies, prosocial behavior, and prosocial attitudes.” Teen Reading Lounge participants showed significant improvements in communication skills, interpersonal relationships, and job-ready skills like literacy and creative problem solving. They also report doing better in school and feeling better prepared to express their thoughts and opinions. This is important for any teen but particularly the marginalized. As one of our site managers said, “It’s a great way for libraries to reach all kinds of kids but especially those that are on the fringes.”

At our recent workshop for facilitators and site managers of Teen Reading Lounge, making space for kids at the margins was a frequent topic. Each site is nested in a community with unique demographics and needs. Effective SEL addresses the needs of all participants, and an effective library or other organization opens itself to the diversity of the community. That’s easier said than done and you just have
to embrace the bumpy road ahead. One of our workshop facilitators remarked, “The [TRL] workshops provide youth development professionals—yes librarians are in the business of youth development if they are working with youth—an opportunity to develop and practice skills that help to enrich the experiences of teens in the program.”

From the examples we’re seeing at Teen Reading Lounge sites throughout Pennsylvania, the humanities are an able partner in making a meaningful impact in the lives of teens and supporting their SEL. Even in this age of infinite distraction, teens forget everything else during a highly spirited TRL discussion. From stories of personal transformation to powerful civic engagement projects, the humanities are sparking change in teens and the broader community. Offering young people the right environment, a place where they have autonomy and feel like they belong, is something we can all be excited about.

References

JEN DANIFO is a Senior Program Officer at the Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC). She works closely with grantees to provide technical support in all aspects of public engagement, program development, and learning and evaluation.

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Imagine a room full of games, toys, art supplies, and “odd bits” (empty boxes, cardboard tubes, scarves, bubbles, pool noodles, rope, clothes pins, and other miscellanea). Children are rolling on the floor, building obstacle courses and castles, and inventing elaborate stories. Older kids are helping delighted toddlers stack block towers higher than they could ever hope to build on their own. Teens are immersed in LEGO creations and explaining board game rules for kids who can’t yet read.

On the sidelines, parents are reading for pleasure, catching up on emails, or sharing coffee and stories with one another. Library staff and volunteers are greeting families and joyfully engaging in another round of a much-loved card game. The adults are stepping back and letting kids connect with one another, resolve their own disputes, and play for the sake of playing.

This is Free Play: free choice, free time, stress free, no expectations, no grades, no instruction. It arises spontaneously and when it has run its course, it fades. Its process is discovery.

A Seed Is Planted
In our 2014–2018 strategic plan, Westbank Libraries began shifting our library programming to a platform model, inviting the community to create programming of their own in our spaces. Amongst a wide range of new programs that people brought us were two new book clubs. The first was an educational psychology book club that was created by Antonio Buehler, the founder of a self-directed education center in our neighborhood and a frequent educational speaker at the library. The second? A YA book club, dreamed up by 11-year-old Marissa (now 13) who was eager to find like-minded readers.

At the time, there really wasn’t any connection between these two programs other than the fact that both were having a difficult time getting off the ground. Attendance was low—often it was just the group’s creator and one librarian discussing the book each month. Fortunately, libraries don’t measure success just by numbers of attendees.

The YA book club allowed a staff member to increase her YA readers’ advisory skills, to learn from one of our community members, and to collaborate and co-create with a willing almost-teen! Whether it was just Marissa and a librarian or a small group of teens and tweens, the YA book club was a place for participants to explore beyond their own interests and preferences, to select books from a wider range of genres, to listen, and to discuss differences of opinions. After the book talk and over a snack, kids bonded over their tiredness, their stress over grades, and their busy extracurricular schedules. Eventually the conversation would veer into silliness as they would dance, sing, laugh, and occasionally even cry. They let loose, and we were proud to give them a safe space for this.

Antonio’s education book group also took time to build, but with a strong reading list it eventually found its audience of interested parents and educators. We now have a steady attendance of about eight to ten attendees (and as many as 15) coming each month to discuss books that
the group now selects themselves. The readings are a continuous source of study for some of our library staff as we tussle with ways to create differences with others, and make friends. In short, play is how children learn to take control of their lives.”

Dr. Gray came to speak at our library, their convenience. The environment is immersive and stimulus rich, and it is geared for inter-age activity where parents are encouraged to let go of their kids.

Public schools in America provide a very structured educational experience—regimented schedule, state curriculum requirements, age segregation, standardized testing and grades, and adult direction. Free Play provides the opposite. Kids choose what they want to play, how they want to play, who they want to play with, and when they want to quit. Younger kids learn from older kids, while older kids develop empathy, collaboration, and leadership skills as they model behavior for younger kids. Kids can fight over a toy and resolve it themselves. They can take their shoes off. They can make noise. They can get messy.

We were pleasantly surprised by an immediate positive response to the program. Families were craving a safe, loosely structured space to connect. They appreciated having a come-and-go program they could enjoy at a time that worked for them. They liked that they could bring kids of varying ages to the same program. Parents welcomed getting to chat with other parents. Sometimes we managed to get a food truck to come so they could have an easy dinner while everyone played!

Parents didn’t instantly grasp the part about letting their kids play on their own, but we passed out bookmarks listing the goals of Free Play, and Antonio and library staff members chatted with newcomer parents to help them understand the importance of play and the importance of letting kids have adult-free decision-making space.

The transformation has been remarkable. Parents look to each other for social cues, and often the helicoptering parent style is borne of being around other parents who hover. As

We provide opportunities through open-ended exploration and play that help grow SEL skills and enrich our kids’ lives, as a strong and necessary complement to traditional school offerings.

programming that supports self-directed learning, where people connect with one another and explore interests on their own terms. The discussions that have ensued when the book club meets have been equally enlightening, as parents and educators express concerns about the stress that schooling and the college admissions process puts on children and families in our community.

The parallels were striking. Two books clubs, but the same discussion topic: kids in our community are stressed. This planted a seed that led to the development of Free Play and the eventual inclusion of teens at Free Play.

Free Play and Open-Ended Exploration

One of the most influential books we read in the education book club was Free to Learn by Dr. Peter Gray. It focuses on the importance of play in childhood development. According to Dr. Gray, “Playing with other children, away from adults, is how children learn to make their own decisions, control their emotions and impulses, see from others’ perspectives, negoti-
more and more parents sit at tables at one side of the room during Free Play, chatting, playing games with each other, reading, or knitting, and generally ignoring their kids, parents who are new to Free Play take their cue and join the other parents. They relax, and so do their kids.

Fortuitously, our YA book club founder, Marissa, turned 13 just about the time we launched Free Play, and 13 is the age when you can officially volunteer at the library. Marissa spent much of the summer with us helping at Free Play and other open-ended exploration programs. She has logged 400 hours of volunteer time this year, much of it side-by-side with our education book club leader, Antonio.

Other open-ended exploration programs have focused on art and video games, and future programs may include coding, science, writing, and music. The formula for each is the same: stimulus-rich environment, extended time frame, inter-age participants, and parents on the sideline. Our next strategic plan has connected, learning, and play in its vision and will allow for considerable growth in this new programming direction.

**Free Play and SEL**

Last spring our local school district called community leaders together to talk about social emotional learning (SEL). District administrators were asking the community to come together to support SEL development in our students, at all grade levels but especially in the high school. A recent article in our local newspaper highlighted the issue in our school district and a similar, neighboring school district. Surveys of high school students indicated a 31 percent rate of depression, with 17 percent reporting that they have seriously considered suicide. 70 percent of the students said the stress of school was too much, 47 percent felt they were “not good enough,” and 47 percent reported missing school because of stress-related health or emotional problems. Students also reported getting an average of six and a half hours of sleep per night, about three hours less than recommended. A 2016 study by the National Institute of Mental Health estimates that 3.1 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 (12.8 percent) had at least one major depressive episode during that year.

SEL competencies include social awareness, empathy, self-awareness, reflection, responsible decision-making, self-management, resiliency, relationship skills, and collaboration. What Peter Gray teaches us is that these are not things we learn in a structured environment like school. “Play is nature’s way of teaching children how to solve their own problems, control their impulses, modulate their emotions, see from other’s perspectives, negotiate differences, and get along with others as equals. There is no substitute for play as a means of learning these skills. They can’t be taught in school.”

Structured environments promote obedience, not independent thinking. Class rankings teach competition, not collaboration. For socioemotional learning, agency is needed.

Public libraries bring a tremendous value to our communities by offering low-structure high-agency programs that our schools simply can’t. We provide opportunities through open-ended exploration and play that help grow SEL skills and enrich our kids’ lives, as a strong and necessary complement to traditional school offerings.

But how do we get teens, who need play the most, to join in?

**Getting Teens to Free Play**

The bulk of the attendees at Free Play are younger children. Teens in our community are overscheduled and facing pressure from varying sources (the school, themselves, their parents, their peers, their coaches, and their hoped-for university destination) to create the perfect college application, complete with top grades in AP courses, high SAT and ACT scores, multiple extracurricular activities, and lots of volunteer hours. The group that might benefit the most from the freedom to engage in unstructured play has too many obligations severely limiting their ability to participate.

We decided to meet our teens (and their families) where they are. They need a chance to play, and they need volunteer credits to satisfy college application expectations. Marissa’s success and joy at being included in Free Play as a volunteer over the summer was a catalyst for creating a teen drop-in volunteer role at all of our Free Play programs. Teens are invited to join us at Free Play to help with setup and cleanup, but more importantly to model play to younger children and to join in if they are invited. Because of the nature of the work, we can accommodate any number of teens that drop in to earn volunteer hours.

As with our fledgling book clubs, success is less about the number of people who participate than it is about the quality of the experience for everyone involved. Teens come in wearing the weight of the school day, and they are sometimes shy about jumping in, but they leave laughing after rediscovering the delights of playing parachute. They help younger children build amazingly tall towers, lifting them to place the block on top. They join in tea parties when summoned by confident four-year-olds. They sit on the floor amidst a mountain of LEGO blocks, assisting in complicated constructions. They nurture their young playmates, helping them learn new games, demonstrating compromise, and assisting in their skill development. On a recent school holiday, we held a seven-hour-long Free Play, and ten
teens came to volunteer, a few staying the entire day because they were having a blast. It was an added bonus that they started the day as strangers to each other and became friends.

Parents are delighted as well. Parents of younger children are more relaxed knowing there are older kids in the mix, and parents of teens are pleased for their kids to find such a rewarding volunteer job.

**What’s Next?**
Currently Free Play sees attendance of 50 to 100 participants weekly. It minimally requires two to three staff/volunteers. Setup takes 20 to 45 minutes depending on how many people are helping, and cleanup goes by quickly as families pitch in before they leave. We provide snacks for kids and coffee for parents to create a comfortable environment. And now we offer teens a reason to play. So how do we continue to grow our other programming to include teens?

The library offers 100–125 programs per month across our two locations, which presents other opportunities to include teens as volunteers. To this end, we’ve been looking at what’s drawing teens to Free Play: flexible times, minimal rules, connection with others, playfulness, and sometimes the chance to reflect on their own childhood—which to teens was forever ago! We are identifying other programs, children’s and adult programs both, that could benefit from adding teens to the mix, where teens will benefit too.

**References**

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The YALSA Update

New YALSA Publication: Teen Summer Learning Programs from Start to Finish

YALSA’s newest publication, *Teen Summer Learning Programs: From Start to Finish* is now available in the ALA Store! Whether you’re just starting the transition from summer reading to summer learning, or have already completed the transition, this guide will help you think through the nuts and bolts of designing, implementing, and improving your summer learning program to ensure success. From planning & budgeting to community engagement to program examples, you won’t end up short on ideas for your teen summer learning program. Buy it now in the ALA Store! ALA members receive a 10% discount.

2019 Symposium Location, Program Proposals, and Travel Stipend

YALSA is excited to announce that the 2019 YA Services Symposium will be held in Memphis, TN November 1 -3. Program proposals for the 2019 symposium are open now through February 1. If you are planning on attending the 2019 symposium, don’t forget to apply for the travel stipend. There are two stipends available – one for library workers and one for graduate students — that will help offset traveling expenses to the symposium. Apply by June 1. Learn more about the symposium at www.ala.org/yalsa/ysymposium or sign up for updates at tinyurl.com/yalsa-symposiumupdates.

YALSA at the 2019 Midwinter Meeting in Seattle

Check out what YALSA has going on at the ALA Midwinter Meeting, January 25-29 in Seattle, WA, by visiting the wiki, and follow along with the activities by checking the YALSAblog and the #alamw19 and #alayma hashtags. https://tinyurl.com/YALSAMW19

2018 Series of Free Teen Competencies Webinars Ends; New Webinar Subscription Opportunity for Non-YALSA Members

This past year YALSA sponsored ten months’ worth of free webinars, focused on our Teen Competencies for Library Staff. These were open to the public, not just YALSA members. If you’d like to view the recordings, please visit our YouTube page.

The free webinar series received overwhelming interest from non-YALSA members. As a result, YALSA decided to introduce a new opportunity for non-members to attend our live webinars.

Non-YALSA members can now attend YALSA’s live monthly webinars and access recordings via a paid, yearly subscription. This is a new opportunity for non-members to attend our live webinars.

Non-YALSA members will continue to have full access to live webinar sessions and all recordings.

Subscription prices are:
- $59: Individuals for 12 months of webinars
- $129: Group subscriptions for 12 months of webinars

State library agencies should contact Linda W. Braun, YALSA CE Consultant, for subscription pricing for their state. Anyone interested in learning more about webinar subscriptions should also, contact Linda at lbraun@leonline.com or visit www.al.org/yalsa/onlinelearning/webinar.

Apply to be a Spectrum Scholar!

Established in 1997, the Spectrum Scholarship Program is ALA’s national diversity and recruitment effort designed to address the specific issue of under-representation of critically needed ethnic librarians within the profession while serving as a model for ways to bring attention to larger diversity issues in the future. YALSA sponsors two Spectrum Scholars with an interest in serving youth ages 12-18 in a library setting. Learn more and apply by March 1 at www.ala.org/advocacy/spectrum.

Apply for the Doctoral Fellowship Award

YALSA’s new Doctoral Fellowship Award will provide up to $3,000 to one recipient to cover research related expenses (including travel to conferences relevant to dissertation research) and is funded by YALSA’s Leadership Endowment. The award aims to encourage research on teens, learning and libraries, specifically research that aligns with YALSA’s National Research Agenda, and/or research that investigates any aspect of YALSA’s Teen Services Competencies for Library Staff. Learn more and apply by March 1 at www.ala.org/yalsa/doctoral-dissertation-fellowship. Eligibility requirements apply.

Reimagining Teen Read Week™ and Teen Tech Week™

As you may be aware, in March 2017, a discussion between YALSA’s board members resulted in a proposal (board document #32) at Annual 2017 to re-envision TTW and TRW to create a larger advocacy/awareness campaign...
to promote the importance of year-round teen services. A follow-up conversation also took place and resulted in the most recent board document, which put forth the task to create a taskforce to come up with possible recommendations for the advocacy/awareness campaign.

As a result, TRW and TTW will be going through some changes and there will be no theme for TRW or TTW starting in 2019. Library staff are encouraged and welcome to continue to celebrate TRW in October and TTW in March or during a time that is convenient for their teens & library, under the general themes of “Read for the Fun of It” and “Get Connected,” respectively. In November, the TTW ning site was deactivated and all resources were relocated to the YALSA website and wiki. Eventually, the TRW ning site resources will also be relocated to the wiki. Please look out for the announcement in early 2019.

To learn more, please read the latest re-envisioning TTW and TRW board document, along with board document #32 from last year. If you would like to be kept in the loop about the re-envisioning process, please sign up here.

Apply by Feb. 1st to Serve on a Strategic Committee, Advisory Board or Taskforce
Get leadership opportunities and be a part of moving YALSA forward while networking with colleagues by serving on one of YALSA’s strategic committees, advisory boards or taskforces! Appointments are made in Feb./Mar. and start work July 1 and are one-year appointments (unless noted).

President-Elect Todd Krueger will appoint members for 2019-2020. Groups include:
- AASL/ALSC/YALSA Committee on School & Public Library Cooperation
- Division & Membership Promotion
- Editorial Advisory Board (for YALS & the YALSAblog)
- Financial Advancement
- Hub Advisory Board
- JRLYA Advisory Board
- Organization & Bylaws
- Research Committee
- Summer Learning (6 months, starting March 1)
- Teens’ Top Ten Committee

Before submitting the form, view the committee FAQ and the committee responsibilities section in the YALSA handbook. Fill out the form by Feb. 1. Questions? Please contact Todd Krueger, YALSA President-Elect, at todd.yalsa@gmail.com.

2019 YALSA Book Awards and Lists
This year, the Youth Media Awards will take place Monday, Jan. 28 at 8AM PST at ALA’s Midwinter Meeting in Seattle, WA. For information on how to view the announcement live online, visit www.ala.org/news/mediapresscenter/press-kits/ymapk. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled that Monday for the winners of all ALA’s book awards, including YALSA’s Alex, Edwards, Morris, Nonfiction, Odyssey, and Printz Awards. You can also check out YALSA’s 2019 Amazing Audio Books for Young Adults, Best Fiction for Young Adults, Great Graphic Novels for Teens, and Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers lists at tinyurl.com/yalsabookawards-lists.

In March, be sure to visit www.ala.org/yalsa/best to find downloadable tools to promote winners at your library, part of YALSA’s new Best of the Best! You’ll be able to download customizable bookmarks featuring the winners of the 2019 Alex, Edwards, Morris, Nonfiction, Odyssey, and Printz Awards. You can also download logos to use on your website or in marketing materials in your library, spine labels to apply to titles that appear in the Best of the Best, and other tools to promote the awards, as well as the Amazing Audio Books for Young Adults, Best Fiction for Young Adults, Great Graphic Novels for Teens, and Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers.
FREE E-Learning just for Members

Monthly interactive webinars on timely topics. Presented by experts and commercial free.

Live webinars are available exclusively to members as a free member benefit the third Thursday of each month.

Webinars available 24/7:
All archived webinars are free for members and available after the live presentation via the Members Only section of the YALSA website at tinyurl.com/yalsamembersonly.

Learn more at www.ala.org/yalsa/webinars

Make your YALSA membership work for you!
“A brilliant example of how different cultures can have unique but accessible cosmology and universal appeal.”  
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

“Lee skillfully weaves Korean folklore into this space opera narrative.”  
—School Library Journal (starred review)

“Refreshingly diverse both in race and gender identity.”  
—Booklist