



Getting Started with Inspire Teaching & Learning

Best Practices in Engaging Educators in On-Demand Professional Learning to Increase SEL Capacity

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Social and emotional learning (SEL)—as demonstrated in research and practice—is an essential ingredient of pre-K to Grade 12 students’ development as learners and future citizens (Durlak et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2017). To implement SEL well, educators not only need access to evidence-based SEL programs, such as Harmony SEL, but they also need access to job-embedded professional learning that develops adult competencies and capacities to promote high-quality SEL instruction (Reilly, Yoder, Ross, Morrison, & Mulholland, 2021; Reilly, Yoder, Ross, & Morrison, 2021). In particular, when educators engage in professional learning that builds their capacities to explicitly instruct on SEL as well as embed SEL within academic instruction, those educators can then begin to create environments for and with students that allow the students to flourish and thrive. But how can education leaders prepare in-service and pre-service educators and out-of-school time staff in creating environments for youth that are conducive to social and emotional growth?

In this brief, we provide readers, particularly district leaders, principals, instructional coaches, and professional-learning facilitators, with research support and practical recommendations for engaging educators in professional learning (PL) focused on SEL and inspirational teaching practices. In addition to discussing approaches that have been used in this area by education leaders nationally, we give particular attention to strategies and research support related to *Inspire Teaching & Learning*, a research-informed virtual professional development program implemented through National University.



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What is SEL and Systemic SEL?

Although multiple frameworks exist that promote effective social and emotional development (Berg, Nolan, Yoder, et al., 2019), most practitioners and policymakers are familiar with and use the five core social and emotional competencies identified by the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Bryant, Crowley, & Davidsen, 2020; Dusenbury, Yoder, Dermody, & Weissberg, 2020). In the organization’s most recent definition, CASEL states that:

“ SEL is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions ” (CASEL, 2020b, p. 1).

CASEL further updated its definition of SEL to be more inclusive of equity, culture, and the key settings in which young people develop and apply their competencies, and also elaborated on a theoretical approach to systemic SEL (see Figure 1). This systemic approach to SEL involves the alignment of policies, practices, and resources across the education system, as well as the collaboration of educators, families, students, and communities in an effort for pre-K to Grade 12 students to learn and apply their social and emotional competencies in the multiple contexts in which they learn and thrive (Mahoney, Weissberg, Greenberg, et al., 2020). CASEL defines four overarching actions in their systemic SEL framework: building foundational support and planning, strengthening adult SEL competencies and capacities, promoting SEL for students, and reflecting on data for continuous improvement.

While each component of systemic SEL is important, this brief specifically focuses on adult SEL, or the building of adult competencies and capacities related to social and emotional learning. Adult SEL is a critical ingredient for any SEL program or practice aimed at students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008). Educators need to be able to successfully understand themselves, manage their own emotions and behaviors, and build authentic relationships with their students, colleagues, families, and community members (Jennings et al., 2019; Yoder, 2014). Importantly, they need the capacities to promote social and emotional development in students. Although multiple approaches exist to promote adult SEL capacities, this brief specifically focuses on on-demand professional learning.

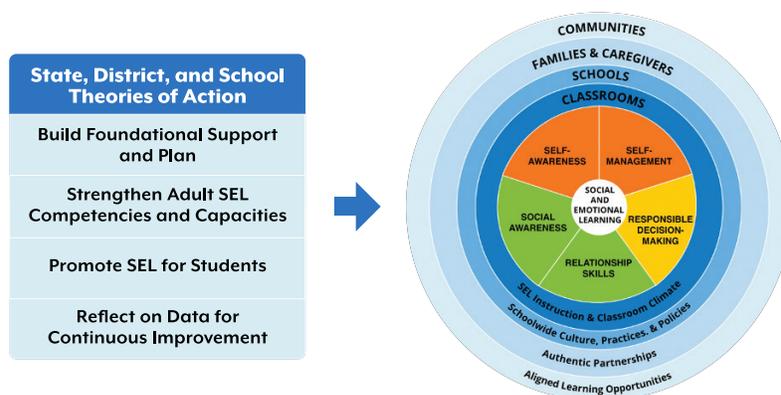


Figure 1. CASEL's systemic framework for social and emotional learning³

For more in-depth information and discussion on how one SEL program, Harmony SEL, can be included within a systemic approach, please review our other briefs focused on administrators supporting effective implementation of SEL programs (Reilly, Yoder, Ross, & Morrison, 2021), and educators implementing evidence-based programs for students (Reilly, Yoder, Ross, Morrison, & Mulholland, 2021).

³ Image retrieved from <https://casel.org/SEL-framework/>

Section I:

The Critical Importance of Professional Learning: From Research to Practice with Inspire

To master the new and complex skills that are required to implement high-quality, relevant, equity-focused instruction, educators need quality and relevant professional learning activities (see Desimone, 2009; Osborne et al., 2019). This is particularly true for skills such as modeling and teaching SEL competencies, as instructional and relational approaches that center adult and student SEL are not typically found within pre-service programs (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Indeed, delivering focused instruction in SEL with an eye towards equity and excellence is no easy task (Jagers et al., 2019; Mahoney et al., 2020), especially for those unfamiliar with SEL content or how teaching strategies embed SEL (Yoder, 2014). It is not surprising, therefore, that multiple research studies support the value that robust professional learning and coaching for educators poses to successful SEL initiatives (Schlund et al., 2020; Stormont et al., 2015; Carter & Van Norman, 2010; Reinke, Stormont, Herman, et al., 2011).

A robust literature exists that elevates the practices, strategies, and approaches that are most important to incorporate in teacher professional learning, regardless of content, that SEL providers should take into account as they support educator SEL implementation. Noteworthy findings are that effective PL should:

- **Incorporate active learning strategies**
(Bayar, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Hylar, & Gardner, 2017; DeMonte, 2013; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Hixon & Buckenmeyer, 2009)
- **Provide opportunities for teacher collaboration**
(DeMonte, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Hylar, & Gardner, 2017; Guskey, 2003; 2009)
- **Provide teachers with illustrative models and examples of the practices being taught** (Demonte, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Hylar, & Gardner, 2017)
- **Be of a sustained duration**
(Bayar, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Hylar, & Gardner, 2017; DeMonte, 2013; Guskey, 1994; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007)

Along with these strategies, research clearly demonstrates the added benefits of PL that is relevant to educators' specific needs. In other words, PL is particularly beneficial when it:

- a) directly targets the specific content or discipline that educators teach, inclusive of pedagogical practices used within the content domains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; DeMonte, 2013; Guskey, 2003; Hixon & Buckenmeyer, 2009; Klein & Riordan, 2011; Penuel et al., 2007), and
- b) is tailored to the specific contexts and needs of participating educators, inclusive of identifying strategies that allow teachers to apply the information within their settings (Bayar, 2014; DeMonte, 2013; Guskey, 1994; 2003; Hawley & Rollie, 2007; Hixon & Buckenmeyer, 2009; Penuel et al., 2007).

In light of these characteristics, dynamic, blended professional learning that can be flexibly delivered to teachers via an online format presents clear advantages (Irby et al., 2015; Tong et al., 2017). *Inspire Teaching & Learning* exemplifies a virtual professional learning program for teachers that, when well implemented, addresses these core principles. In the following sections, we examine what research identifies as effective practices for delivering SEL professional learning to teachers, with a close-up look at the Inspire program as a positive exemplar.



Program Vision and Goals

As outlined by its developers, Inspire celebrates and develops inspirational educators through on-demand courses and resources designed to support social and emotional learning and inspirational instruction in pre-K–12 classrooms, out-of-school time learning environments, and in university settings.

Collaborating with over 360,000 in-service and 320,000 pre-service teachers, Inspire seeks to provide research-informed, on-demand professional learning experiences to create inspirational educators for every student across every grade level. Based on the premise that academic achievement is interconnected with social and emotional learning and effective teaching practices, Inspire seeks to enable educators to create safe and inspiring learning environments with cognitively and emotionally engaging instruction where all students flourish and thrive. Inspire is growing nationally to help develop, support, and create experiences wherein teachers develop strategies to implement the most current and relevant approaches to support the vision of having an inspiring educator in every learning environment.



Research on Inspire

To date, the present authors from the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University (JHU CRRE) have conducted evaluation studies examining the influence of the Inspire program as it has been implemented in both elementary and secondary K–12 settings. Presently, JHU CRRE is in the midst of a four-year longitudinal study of 20 elementary schools in Southern California using the Inspire and Harmony SEL programs. As part of this qualitative research to date, interviews and focus groups revealed that the Inspire modules were received very positively by both teachers and administrators alike. The vast majority of teachers agreed that “the modules were helpful for developing knowledge of effective teaching practices for social and emotional skills, knowledge of social and emotional content, and improving their ability to connect with their students” (Morrison et al., 2019, p. iv).

As part of a second study, JHU CRRE examined the influence of Inspire professional development when implemented with high school teachers at an alternative charter school in San Diego, CA. Similarly, the participating teachers, as well as the school’s principals, agreed that the Inspire modules enhanced the efficacy of teaching practices across the school. Notably:

“ The school administrators reported that the ‘plethora’ of topics provided through the Inspire modules was a benefit in that it gave teachers the freedom to choose modules that connected most with what was happening in their classroom. Teachers found the modules to be engaging and relevant, improved their understanding of social and emotional learning (SEL) and content, increased their knowledge of effective practices for teaching SEL skills, and increased their ability to connect to their students. For newer teachers, the modules provided useful training, while more experienced teachers believed their teaching practices became stronger through the Inspire training. Teachers particularly appreciated how the modules are not overly structured or required implementation to follow a specific sequence. They valued how adaptable the modules are to meet their individual needs, the ability to access the modules within their own schedules, the variety of topics, and access to the module transcripts. ”
(JHU CRRE, 2019, p. 3)

Section II

The Inspire Program

Inspire was created with the intention of identifying the knowledge, skills, and mindsets of educators who have a transformational impact on their students, and then creating professional learning experiences to develop other inspirational teachers. When looking at inspirational teaching, there are a range of competencies that impact both the teacher and, ultimately, the students.

With this context in mind, Inspire consists of two instructional pathways: (a) developing SEL capacities and (b) building teaching practices. Each pathway is comprised of multiple units that consist of the on-demand modules (see Figure 2). These pathways represent what is currently known about the pedagogical practices that best promote student growth and development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019), and also align with professional learning needed to successfully implement SEL programs like Harmony (Reilly et al., 2021).

For example, research demonstrates the inextricable link between social, emotional, and academic learning (SOLD Alliance, 2020), making it critically important to include on-demand modules that not only provide direct instruction on SEL, but also provide practices that educators can implement to promote SEL development more broadly (Yoder, 2014). Research also shows that for SEL to live to its full potential and be in service of equity and excellence, it must be inclusive of culturally responsive practices (Jagers et al., 2019) and ensure that adult SEL competency and capacity development is at the forefront (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008). Further, research demonstrates that youth learn best in environments that are identity-affirming, safe and supportive, and that feature instruction that allows for whole child development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Research also highlights the importance of family engagement and has demonstrated the importance of ensuring that social, emotional, and academic learning is done in partnership with families and caregivers (Mahoney et al., 2020). Through incorporating features and strategies that target these areas, Inspire works to position educators to improve their knowledge and skills in order to better support holistic student development.

Recognizing that educators cannot complete all 70-plus modules offered through the Inspire pathways (which are each 30 to 60 minutes in duration), educators can customize their use of Inspire modules to fit within any existing professional learning environment. After assessing the needs of a school, university, or organization, Inspire suggests that facilitators use the CARE model (Complete, Apply, Refine, Elevate) to successfully integrate inspirational teaching methods with their educators (see Figure 2 for overview and Figure 3 for the full CARE model path). The CARE model guides adaptive implementation of the Inspire modules among individual educators, small groups, or with entire staff. Individual educators can use observation feedback, dialogue with instructional coaches, and diagnostic tools to identify their specific needs. To provide educators with choice, diagnostic tools are made available through Inspire that can be used to help teachers identify the modules that are most relevant to their individual needs.

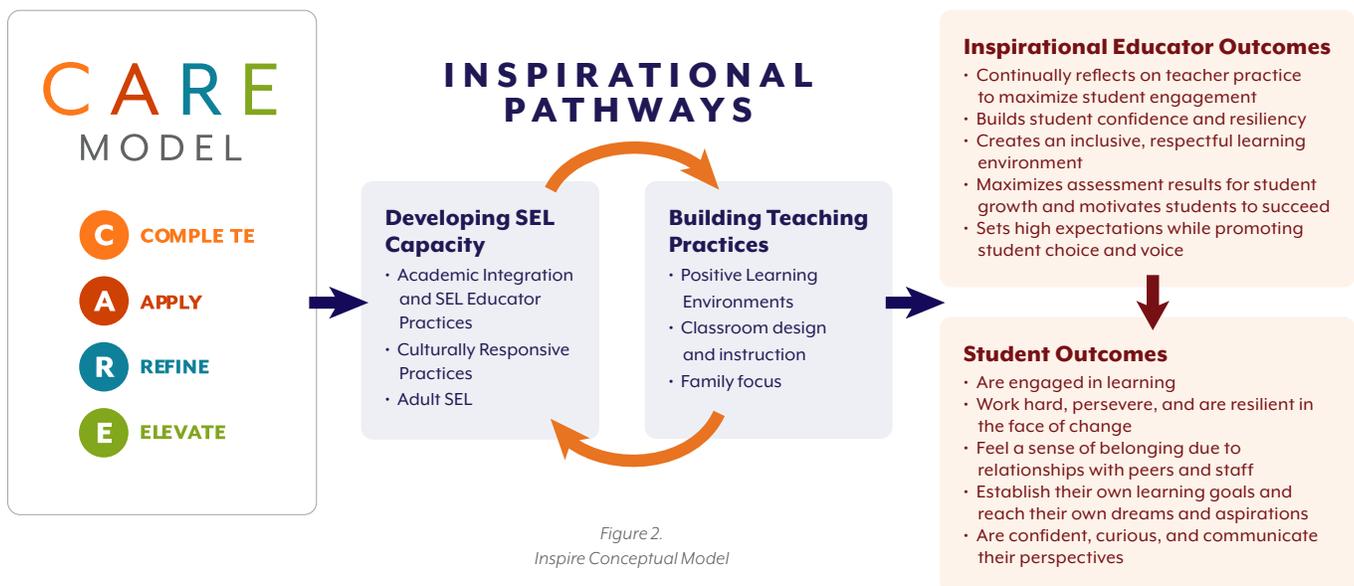


Figure 2.
Inspire Conceptual Model

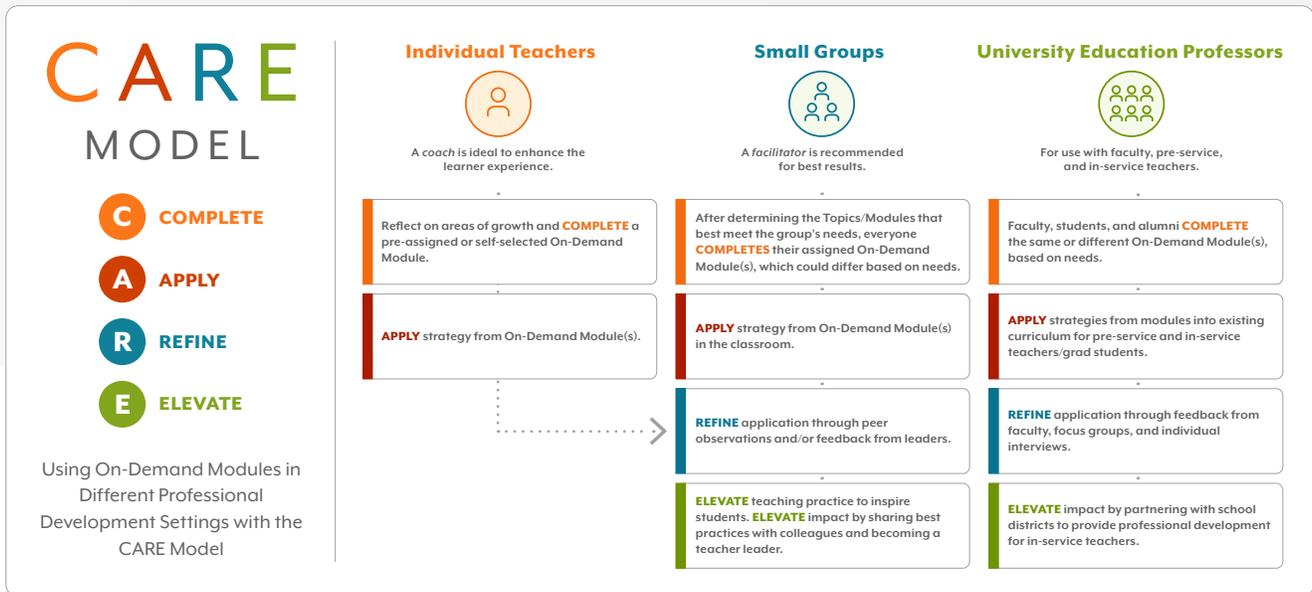


Figure 3.
CARE Model

Inspire modules were developed with the latest evidence on effective SEL implementation and educator practices. The program's conceptual model (see Figure 2) outlines the expected means through which its pathways influence inspirational educator and student outcomes. For example, if an educator reflects on their ability to produce engaging instruction, and then works to develop new skills to increase student engagement in equitable ways, students are likely to be confident, curious, and communicative in their learning community. Similarly, if educators know how to build student confidence and use strategies to target this area, students are more likely to work hard and persevere. Ultimately, if educators are able to leverage techniques such as these to create inclusive and respectful learning environments, student experiences can be healthier and more productive. As Inspire continues to engage in continuous improvement, Inspire staff, alongside their partners, will continue to test and refine their model of professional learning experiences, and continue to better understand expected inspirational teacher and student outcomes identified by National University and the National Center for Urban School Transformation.

Section III

Maximizing Success with SEL – Best Practices for Professional Learning

Suppose that you're a school leader or staff lead from a community organization that is beginning to incorporate SEL into its instructional programming for the first time. You ask yourself: "How can I help my staff learn the strategies and techniques needed to help foster our students' social and emotional growth? How can I provide them individualized support and create a collaborative environment where all adults recognize they have a role to play in supporting student SEL?"

In this section, we first identify the teacher professional learning strategies that are most strongly supported by the research ("What the Research Shows"). Then, we showcase how Inspire aligns with the best practice ("Inspire in Action"), and then using Inspire as an exemplar, we illustrate how a district used Inspire in practice ("Application").



BEST PRACTICE #1

Tailor training to your participants' specific context and specific PL goals

What the Research Shows

One of the most prominent recurring themes in the research on teacher PL is the importance of tailoring training to the specific school contexts and needs of participating educators (Bayar, 2014; DeMonte, 2013; Guskey, 1994; 2003; Hixon & Buckenmeyer, 2009; Penuel et al., 2007). To the extent possible, it is important that the PL aligns with other initiatives and instructional priorities that may be happening in their school simultaneously (Guskey, 2003). An effective, job-embedded professional learning experience will also consider variation in instructional skill and familiarity with the topic being addressed. For example, leaders may offer teacher choice in selecting the professional learning topics most relevant to their identified professional growth goals (Simmons, Villa, & Borden, 2016). Indeed, relevance to their everyday work has been found to be a key driver of teachers' satisfaction with professional learning initiatives (Attebury, 2018).

Ensuring that professional learning aligns with the needs of educators, as well as their school context, is particularly important for educators as they develop their capacities to deliver SEL instruction. Educators vary in their familiarity with SEL, and schools vary in their approach and available resources to implement SEL effectively (Agle et al., 2019; Boustani et al., 2020; CASEL, 2019; Lawson et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016). Furthermore, given the wide variety of instructional frameworks and vocabulary that are part of the broader SEL paradigm, it is important that schools create a common language on SEL and are consistent with their application of their chosen framework (Berg, Nolan, Yoder, et al., 2019; Dymnicki et al., 2014; Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015).

Inspire in Action

Inspire provides an extensive searchable database of SEL instructional videos and modules that can be easily tailored to match the needs of both veteran and novice teachers. Once facilitators of professional learning carefully co-construct goals based on their participants' needs, they can select the on-demand learning module(s) that best align with these objectives (Tekkumru-Kisa & Stein, 2017). Inspire provides a "setting the stage" section that helps educators identify what the learning objectives are for a specific module and helps educators prepare to engage in the module by connecting with their current knowledge and background. When used by a PL facilitator, this tool can be employed to assist educators in discussing the content and identifying strategies to apply the content to their specific classrooms.

Application

Dr. Larry Chen is the SEL director for the Little River School District. Situated in a rural-suburban area in the Midwest, Little River has five elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools. In the wake of increasing school suspensions and cyberbullying, last year the district announced goals for integrating SEL into school environments to improve instruction, equity, and climate. As a former associate superintendent, Dr. Chen well understood that a "top-down, one-size-fits-all" approach wouldn't be successful. The 10 Little River schools differ from one another substantially in educator experience and student characteristics. He opted instead for a form of "guided" site-based autonomy. As a first step, he convened a district-wide "training session" inviting the principal and several teachers from each school to attend. During the meeting, he introduced the Inspire program and its resources, using the "Inspire Portal" (<https://online.inspireteaching.org>) for demonstration and small-group activities. He concluded the meeting with an impassioned charge for each school to develop and document a site-based professional learning program tailored to its school improvement plan (SIP) and specific needs.

Two months later, the school representatives met again to discuss and share their ideas for PL plans. All drew extensively from the Inspire program resources, notably the on-demand modules on effective classroom and SEL practices. He also encouraged the schools to build embedded PL capacity by

engaging their own teachers and staff in coach and facilitator roles. Over the next few weeks, the schools began putting their plans into action. Rapid Falls High School, for example, focused its PL strategies on preventing bullying, establishing clear school rules, and using “restorative justice” in classroom management. All teachers are expected to complete selected Inspire modules as well as participate in team discussions of “implications and actions.” West Fork Elementary School, in contrast, decided to pursue an individualized PL model in which each teacher will create their own SEL goals (personal and student-centered) and work with the primary or intermediate grades coach to identify and strategically employ Inspire activities and resources. Importantly, in accord with research findings on effective strategies, these diverse approaches share the common element of relevance to context and specific SEL goals.

BEST PRACTICE #2

Incorporate active learning strategies and opportunities for teacher collaboration

What the Research Shows

Similar to students, educators also benefit greatly from learning activities that incorporate active forms of instruction that allow them to construct and apply new knowledge. For example, educators benefit when they see others model the instructional techniques, interactions, or activities they hope to learn and apply in their settings (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010; Demonte, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Modeling may take the form of videos of accomplished teaching (such as those provided through Inspire), demonstration lessons, sample lesson plans, unit plans, or exemplar student work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, educators benefit when they receive tangible materials that they can take with them from the trainings. Whether it be curriculum documents, process charts, or actual SEL lesson plans or student activities that they could use the next day, the likelihood that educators will employ the strategies they learn about during trainings increases when they have the necessary knowledge and resources to implement the strategies right away.

While modeling is essential, as it pertains to many forms of virtual PL, it is also important that facilitators go beyond simply having educators watch PL videos or complete virtual modules independently (Tekkumru-Kisa & Stein, 2017). Use of active learning strategies (Bayar, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; DeMonte, 2013; Desimone et al., 2002; Hixon & Buckenmeyer, 2009), such as collaborative and cooperative learning techniques, noticeably enhance participant learning (DeMonte, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey, 2003; 2009). Ideally, trainings should strive to leverage active learning strategies that are based on adult learning theory, recognize and leverage educators’ prior knowledge and experiences, provide educators with choices based on interests and needs, and include ongoing opportunities for reflection and inquiry (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). When training uses active learning, educators are more likely to develop “buy-in” to the practices learned, and the training itself is more likely to impact educator practice (DeMonte, 2013; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017; Guskey, 2003; 2009).

Inspire in Action

Within Inspire modules, participants engage in multiple interactive activities, videos, and reflection prompts in which they are provided opportunities to actively think about and act upon the information they learn. Assessments provided at the conclusion of each module provide opportunities for educators to demonstrate their new knowledge and skills. Educators also have access to additional activities and resources to extend their learning about the particular Inspire topic. Facilitators of PL can also use Inspire modules in a blended learning format, providing opportunities for teachers to role play, discuss common problems of practice, or use the Inspire Coaching Guides to model how they would use key practices within their classroom.

Application

Dr. Alison Carpenter is in her fifth year as principal of North Crest High School in the Little River School District. No stranger to the many social and academic pressures that today's adolescents experience, she fully embraced Dr. Chen's district-wide SEL initiative. She has long felt that high schools have trailed elementary and middle schools in addressing students' and adults' social and emotional needs. Following several faculty meetings to air ideas, the teachers and staff consensually supported implementing school-wide PL in SEL provided that it was (a) adaptive to individual needs and (b) actively embedded in everyday practices as opposed to attending workshops and listening to speakers. Principal Carpenter, long an advocate of "learning by doing," was fully on board with these sentiments. Using a blended learning approach, as a first step, each teacher chose to engage in the culturally responsive unit or asked to review the Inspire Portal's "Map of Modules," which summarizes the focuses of over 70 PL units on effective strategies for teaching and building SEL capacity. Each teacher then submitted a brief statement of their PL goals and a listing of up to 10 preferred modules. Working with her two PL coaches, Principal Carpenter grouped teachers into five-member teams based on similar interests. The PL plan was then put into action driven by two cooperative learning activities. One activity entailed completing the selected Inspire modules in pairs or triads and developing associated SEL lessons. The second was co-delivering one of the SEL lessons to students.

BEST PRACTICE #3

Provide coaching

What the Research Shows

Research suggests that coaching, particularly if provided by a coach with expertise specific to working with educators, can significantly enhance ongoing professional learning (Demonte, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Coaching can serve as a valuable component for developing teachers' competencies in SEL instruction and modeling (Stormont et al., 2015; Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

Coaching should work in conjunction with other features of the professional learning program and should be aligned with the targeted learning needs of the educator. It should be of a substantive duration, be content-focused, and provide educators with opportunities to collaborate with peers, observe others, and engage in personal reflection (Demonte, 2013; Desimone & Pak, 2017). Using data to inform coaching (Hershfeldt et al., 2012; Wise & Hammack, 2011) and sustaining each teacher's focus on ongoing improvement are also key practices (Wise & Hammack, 2011). It is also beneficial for coaches to incorporate SEL strategies within the coaching cycle by focusing on adult SEL competencies and educator belief systems to build rapport, trust, and buy-in with educators (Hershfeldt et al., 2012; Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

Ongoing coaching and expert support can help teachers gain expertise directly applicable to their individual needs. One-on-one coaching, coaching during group workshops, and even remote coaching done online can all be used effectively as part of professional development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Irby et al., 2015; Tong et al., 2017). Research suggests that the benefits of coaching, at least in part, are derived from the opportunities for feedback and reflection that it provides (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), regardless of format (e.g., one-on-one, collaborative, or virtual professional learning). As teachers participate in programs such as Inspire, these benefits can be cultivated along with numerous others.

Inspire in Action

Each Inspire module includes a coaching guide to help coaches facilitate conversation, observation, reflection, and action-planning between the teacher and the coach. Each coaching tool comes with a module

⁴ InTASC – Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium

summary, outlines the module's alignment with InTASC standards,⁴ and provides key takeaways to discuss the knowledge garnered from the module. Recognizing that teachers' actions are influenced by the intersection of their mindset, knowledge, and skills, the coaching tool also includes the "essential knowledge," "essential skills," and "essential mindsets" related to each practice. To support observation and reflection, the tool also comes with "skill in action" and "questions for discussion" sections.

Application

In the Little River School District, West Fork Elementary School oriented its SEL professional learning on a model they named "Coaches for Change." Following the initial district meeting with Dr. Chen, the school leadership team met and recruited two volunteers with SEL experience, Raj Abdi and Gloria Charles, to serve as PL coaches for the primary and intermediate grades, respectively. In the fall, each attended a full-day training session on SEL coaching, which was delivered by Dr. Chen and an expert from outside the district. The Coaches for Change model is intentionally highly individualized and based on the school community's recognition of its teachers' variable backgrounds, grade levels, and comfort with SEL. Under guidance from their assigned coach, teachers developed personalized PL plans that specified goals and activities to sharpen and broaden SEL instruction and SEL skills in interacting with others. Ms. Peters, a fifth-grade teacher, recognized that she struggles with making personal connections with students to motivate and "reach" them more effectively. Working with Coach Charles, Ms. Peters devised a plan to complete several Inspire modules dealing with connecting with students, accommodating diversity, and supporting students affected by trauma. Her second goal was to create lesson plan components that explicitly addressed the cultivation of positive relationships with students. She scheduled monthly observations with Coach Charles, who used the Inspire coaching guides as a tool to formatively observe the interactions in the classroom and then used the discussion guides and essential skills to better understand Ms. Peter's thinking and instructional decisions. As a coach, Gloria Charles' objectives with her teachers are to build trust, provide genuine and timely feedback, encourage self-reflection, and emphasize continual growth over short-term successes. Luckily, she has the Inspire coaching guides to help her do just that!

BEST PRACTICE #4

Consider adult learning and social and emotional skill during professional development

What the Research Shows

Although we want to engage educators like we do our students, educators have unique learning needs. Generally, educators are more self-directed, mature, more problem-oriented, and live under social circumstances and expectations that differ from their students (Papastamatis et al., 2009, p. 85). Further, their learning and, ultimately, classroom interactions have different consequences than they do for students. Accordingly, adult learning theory, or andragogy, should be applied when designing and delivering professional trainings for educators (Papastamatis et al., 2009; Simmons & Borden, 2015). This theory rests on several main assertions (Simmons & Borden, 2015; Knowles, 1978) which are also highlighted in other best practices:

- **Adults often prefer self-directed, autonomous forms of learning that can be applied to solve problems**
- **Adults need to know why the topic they are learning is important**
- **An adult's accumulated life experience provides the foundation for what they will learn**
- **Adults are motivated by learning that satisfies their individual interests and needs**
- **Adults are typically more internally as opposed to externally motivated**

(Simmons & Borden, 2015, p. 2; Knowles, 1978)

Through adhering to these concepts in the context of SEL training, facilitators can enhance the effectiveness of the trainings themselves while simultaneously fostering the social and emotional growth of the participating teachers. To foster social and emotional development in adults, trainers should apply those strategies known to enhance SEL development in students (see Reilly et al., 2021) while making slight modifications to align the actual learning activities with adult learning theory. For example, research-based SEL approaches such as explicit teaching of SEL skills (Durlak et al., 2011; Lawson et al., 2019; Boustani et al., 2020), use of carefully sequenced SEL lessons (Durlak et al., 2011), and use of active-learning techniques (Durlak et al., 2011) such as role-plays (Boustani et al., 2020) can all be adapted to align with adult learning theory and used as SEL instruction for educators. These principles are particularly important as facilitators and coaches differentiate professional learning, coaching, and support based on the professional and social and emotional needs of educators. To make this more concrete, consider the different needs of novice and expert educators. Beginning educators are often in a “survival stage,” worried about being liked by students and their supervisors and concerned with the basics of instruction and classroom management (Papastamatis et al., 2009, p. 86). By contrast, as educators gain experience, discover ways of coping with survival concerns, and improve their overall skills, they tend to shift their attention more and more toward instructional and student-centered issues. It’s often not until educators attain a high level of proficiency that student results and mastery become their driving focus (Papastamatis et al., 2009). Indeed, teachers, like their students, will vary considerably in their social and emotional needs, and therefore the professional learning that they receive must take these differences into account.

Inspire in Action

Inspire facilitates trainings that incorporate concepts of adult learning and SEL development. In fact, the program was developed using principles of adult learning theory specifically. According to the program’s developers: “[Adult learning] practices inform our work designing professional development for teachers. The content, format, and delivery method of our On-Demand Modules takes into consideration the needs, interests, experiences, and motivations of adult learners.” (Simmons & Borden, 2015, p. 2). Ultimately, in delivering Inspire, facilitators and coaches should remain mindful of these concepts and consider the ways that they can leverage these strategies to help their trainings more powerfully resonate with teachers.

Application

Paige Muccini is a trained SEL Facilitator who divides her time between the three middle schools in the Little River School District. While she tries to know every teacher personally and support each as she can, she views her primary role as using the Inspire modules and other resources to help the principals and teacher leaders create professional learning environments promoting SEL and equity. Last year was particularly stressful for teachers and school communities overall in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers had to deal with intensified personal and student health concerns while alternating between variations of face-to-face and remote instruction. This year, teacher attrition, including early retirements, was up 30 percent across the district. Considering these challenges, the three schools embraced a PL orientation focused on adult SEL. Using the Inspire modules on intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, Ms. Muccini and a teacher volunteer from each school began developing a planned sequence of structured PL activities consisting of three individual and group components. First, all teachers would be expected to complete per a specified timeline the same five Inspire On-Demand Modules:

- 1. Coping with Teacher Stress**
- 2. Building Relationships with Students**
- 3. Strategies for Communicating with Parents**
- 4. Maintaining Professional Relationships with Students**
- 5. Maintaining Professional Relationships with Parents**

Second, the teachers reserved a portion of their regular subject-area group meetings to discuss, reflect on, and create action items after each module. Third, drawing on the CASEL SEL framework's emphasis on external community connections, the schools developed partnerships with local health providers to make psychological, counseling, and medical services more visible and accessible to the entire school community. Teacher reactions to the PL have been highly positive thus far. For example, many have conveyed that they no longer feel isolated in coping with everyday stresses and their interactions with students and peers have become more sensitive and genuine.

BEST PRACTICE #5

Ensure that learners set and actualize goals

What the Research Shows

The best practices discussed thus far are geared towards those who deliver professional development. However, it is also worth considering the practices that educators themselves can use to enhance their own experiences with professional learning. Research on professional learning best practices elevates the important role that goal setting, reflection, and application can play (Brooks et al., 2021).

Indeed, educators should take several steps to ensure that they derive value from the professional learning they engage in. In advance of completing a training, educators should set goals for what they hope to learn and familiarize themselves with the virtual platform and the auxiliary resources that might be made available to them (Brooks et al., 2021). Educators should also attune to the social norms of virtual trainings, or norms of the blended learning experience, and make plans for how they will monitor their learning and their progression toward their goals. During the sessions, educators should take notes, write down questions as they think of them, and to the extent appropriate, engage with the presenter (e.g., use chat features, etc.). Perhaps most importantly, participants should take steps following the training to reflect on their learning and identify actions they can take to apply the lessons learned in their classroom practice (Brooks et al., 2021).

Inspire in Action

As noted at the beginning of this article, Inspire developed the CARE model for educators to engage individually or in collaboration with colleagues. Using this framework, educators thoughtfully complete Inspire modules, apply the strategies learned in their classroom, refine their application of these strategies through observing others or participating in coaching, and ultimately elevate their practice by applying their refined use of these skills (Inspire, 2017). Educators repeat this cycle of completing, applying, refining, and elevating throughout their completion of the Inspire program.

Application

Mark Twain Elementary School was the first school in the Little River School District to implement the Harmony SEL program (<https://online.harmonysel.org>). Every day in every classroom, students engage in Harmony activities such as Meet Up, Buddy Up, storybook reading, and class discussions designed to strengthen socialization, communication, and interpersonal skills. After two years, educators are already reporting noticeable positive changes in classroom and playground behavior, as well as in overall school climate. When the districtwide SEL initiative was announced this year, the educators and the principal, Mike Holbrook, examined the Inspire portal and viewed the program as

an ideal complement to Harmony. Particularly appealing was the Inspire CARE model whose action components are *Complete*, *Apply*, *Refine*, and *Elevate*. Drawing from the model, the school developed a PL plan oriented around having teachers work in small groups to review and improve SEL practices, particularly those related to Harmony. One group's goal is to integrate Harmony practices with academic instruction in core subjects. For the first CARE step, the teachers Completed several Inspire modules on instructional design (e.g., "Preparing Student Discussions") as preparation for developing and modifying lessons to promote SEL skills. Another group's focus for Complete was increasing family engagement with SEL, an area addressed by four of the Inspire modules. For the Apply component, each teacher in the first group individually developed and taught an academic lesson incorporating SEL skills. Gloria Weiss, for example, selected social studies as the target subject for her fifth graders. The SEL portion of her new lesson incorporated small-group and whole-class discussions on the Voting Acts Law of 1965 from the perspectives of equity and respecting the voice of others. In the second teacher group, Alberta Hays developed take-home exercises for students to practice selected SEL skills (e.g., empathy and reflective listening) with family members. The third CARE component, Refine, took place in different ways. The most common was teachers inviting a peer or the SEL coach to react to their lesson plan and self-evaluation of the classroom trial. The approach described as most helpful, however, was having the peer or coach actually observe the lesson being taught and provide recommendations for refinement. These refined teaching practices collectively and increasingly are establishing the foundation for the culminating CARE component—Elevating the PL schoolwide. One elevation process is sharing effective strategies, such as Ms. Weiss' social studies lesson, with other teachers on professional development days. A second process is "elevating" student learning and engagement through continued usage of the refined practices. A third is integrating student SEL (Harmony) with adult SEL (Inspire) in a schoolwide community of practice.

Conclusion

Inspire is a flexible professional learning program that can be used independently by educators or integrated directly into the comprehensive professional learning approaches used by schools and organizations. The flexibility allows for educator choice in professional learning that leads to greater autonomy and greater engagement among educators—both core ingredients in making better working conditions for educators. As described throughout this brief, adult social and emotional learning must be a central part of an educator's knowledge, skills, and mindsets. As district leaders, principals, instructional coaches, and professional learning facilitators begin to incorporate blended and personalized learning opportunities, educators will grow as inspirational leaders and will foster enhanced positive outcomes for students.



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