Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy 5 (2025) 100086

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy

journal homepage: www.journals.elsevier.com/social-and-emotional-learning-research-practice-and-policy

Giving to teachers what we ask them to give to others: Supporting adult SEL through reflective insight and healing

Amanda Moreno [a,*], Jeanette Banashak [a], Maria Kontoudakis [a], Anita Evans [a], Raelen Bajet [b], Abbie Laase [c]

[a] Erikson Institute, USA
[b] Kamehameha Schools, USA
[c] Island School, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Adult SEL
Reflective insight
Healing
SELove

ABSTRACT

This SEL in Practice article describes the content, methods, and lessons learned from three cohorts of implementation of the *SELove* (pronounced S-E-L love) program in the context of a university partnership with the early childhood education community in Hawai'i. The series is a 9-month long professional development experience with two primary aims: 1) To build teachers' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills for use in their interactions with students, and 2) To increase teacher wellness and retention by acknowledging and providing a modicum of direct relief from the crisis of low morale and high turnover that besets the teaching profession today. Key aspects of the model that were specially designed to center the adult experience and create a healing space for teachers through the lens of SEL are highlighted, such as the use of reflective insight circles, and how they helped teachers access their inner wisdom. Preliminary program evaluation information as well as the perspectives of participant authors are included, and suggest that the program has promise for building teachers' capacity to nurture SEL skills in children and themselves, lightening their burdens, and helping them reframe their challenges in ways that renew their love of their chosen vocation.

SELove showed us the powerful need we all have for a gentle place to bring our experiences. A place we can all release ourselves from trying to solve the problem or do things the way someone else would. A chance to wonder and be curious about ourselves and others, that keeps us connected to our common humanity in so many supportive ways. I felt myself shift from the role of fixer to "reflector" instead. This has helped me care for myself in the same way I do my keiki [children], one of my primary goals when I signed up for SELove. – Participant author Abbie

Introduction

Approaches to deepening adult learning have existed for decades, such as co-constructing and activating adults' pre-existing knowledge, values, and skills in service of the desired new learning (Beavers, 2009) or engaging in "reflective practice," which involves being provided opportunities to think critically about their work in order to manage the complexity of day-to-day practice (Curry & Epley, 2021). However, such models have also been extensively critiqued for being applied in ways that are overly individualistic and inconsiderate of systemic issues, "mechanistic" as opposed to emotion-based or embodied, or too prone to "confessionals," surveillance, and control (Botelho, 2021; Bradbury et al., 2010; Saltiel, 2012; Tremmel, 1993). In our recent years of providing professional development (PD) in the area of social and emotional learning (SEL), we have come to believe that the SEL field, because of its focus on emotions and relationships, is uniquely positioned to redress or even *heal* some of the demoralization that has become prevalent in the teaching profession (Santoro, 2021), resulting in all-time crisis levels of both recruitment and retention (Irwin et al., 2023; Kotowski et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2022). We are certainly not the first to consider the relevance of the concept of healing in education as scholars of color, from Indigenous backgrounds, and those employing trauma-responsive frameworks have long been calling on schools to take up their role in healing the wounds that they have created and those they haven't (Garcia, 2019; Ginwright, 2015; Regnier, 1994; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2020; Villanueva, 2013). This article describes one initiative that

* Correspondence to: Erikson Institute, 451 N. Lasalle Street, Chicago, IL 60654, USA.
E-mail address: amoreno@erikson.edu (A. Moreno).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sel.2025.100086
Received 30 July 2024; Received in revised form 8 January 2025; Accepted 30 January 2025
Available online 1 February 2025

aimed to answer that call, and help bring closer together the intuitively compatible fields of SEL and healing-centered education. Our focus is adult-forward in order to honor teachers' full humanity (Reid, 2024) and finally offer to them what the SEL field demands they offer to others.

The professional development series we will describe here, entitled *SELove* (pronounced S-E-L love), was a university partnership with the early childhood education community in Hawai'i, developed between 2018 and 2020 and implemented with three cohorts of teachers thus far. SELove is a 9-month long program with two primary aims: 1) To build teachers' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills for use in their interactions with students, and 2) To increase teacher wellness and retention by acknowledging and providing a modicum of direct relief from the crisis that besets the teaching profession today. The model curates diverse wisdoms and theoretical frameworks relevant to SEL including attachment theory and trauma-responsive care (e.g., Lipscomb et al., 2019), the neuroscience of stress (e.g., Perry, 2006), and non-violent communication (Rosenberg, 2002), and is focused on supporting teachers in becoming more reflective and intentional about their "ways of seeing and being," i.e., how teachers bring their *selves*, including beliefs, attitudes, and past experiences to their work (Dall'Alba, 2009; Dencev & Collister, 2010; Ergas & Ritter, 2020). This article provides an overview of the content and structure of the series, highlights three aspects of the model that were especially important in our attempts to support adult SEL and promote healing, and shares lessons learned through program evaluation and the experiences of the participants, two of whom are authors on the present article.

Why all the focus on adult SEL?

Although the amount of attention and resources devoted to the teaching of social and emotional concerns in schools has waxed and waned over the years depending on the economic and political tug-of-war of the day, the pendulum continues to swing back to the idea that even if one's primary concern is global economic competitiveness, an education that focuses on academics alone is wildly inadequate. Developmental neuroscientist Adele Diamond puts it this way: "Want to optimize executive functions and academic outcomes? Simple, just nourish the human spirit" (Diamond, 2013; p. 205). While there are valid cultural debates and inevitable messiness around about what *sort* of social and emotional education should be provided, the evidence for the effectiveness of a variety of SEL approaches and for a variety of student populations is nevertheless undeniable at this point (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2023; Cipriano et al., 2024; Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2017).

Yet, even amid growing evidence and appetite for SEL in schools, it wasn't long before it became obvious that SEL was somewhat unlike other curricular content in that it is even more dependent on teacher dispositions and "ways of being," which could not be assumed to be pre-existing. Efforts to characterize and advocate for a systemic approach to SEL increased, and of course, teacher training and support was identified as a critical element in any SEL system (Mahoney et al., 2021; Mart et al., 2015; Meyers et al., 2019). In particular, Schonert-Reichl and colleagues contributed a body of work identifying "a profound disconnect" (Niemi & Weissberg, 2017; p. 3) between what teachers were increasingly expected to know and do related to SEL and the training and support that was offered to them in pre-service teacher preparation programs, regardless of whether SEL terminology was specifically used (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, et al., 2015; 2017).

In addition to teacher education, SEL models and programs themselves also bear a significant portion of the burden in attending to the needs of the adults we expect to implement SEL. Through their development and evaluation of the CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) for teachers program, Jennings and colleagues took a major step for the field by demonstrating that a mindfulness-based program that was teacher-facing and involving no direct activities for children could still be successful in improving not only teacher wellbeing, but also classroom climate and child outcomes (Brown et al., 2023; Jennings et al., 2013; 2017; 2019). SEL models have continued to be expanded to include key adult skills and "moves" such as building trusting relationships, creating community, and fostering self-reflection, that should both enhance their own coping and self-regulation in the classroom as well as "map on" to the SEL-based goals we have for students (Markowitz & Bouffard, 2022; Turner, 2023). The 2023 SEL conference held by the field-founding organization CASEL (Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) had its theme dedicated to the adult leaders of SEL initiatives. In short, consensus is growing around the notion that *all SEL is adult SEL*, and that figuring out the best ways to authentically train and support teachers is a critical frontier for the field.

Beyond the seemingly obvious truth that people need their own expertise in a topic before they can teach it to others, some programs that hope to address adult SEL, including ours, are evolving to also attempt to provide some direct relief to teachers from larger societal stresses that impact them. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching has become one of the most stressful professions, with far-reaching impacts on teachers, the teaching profession, and students (Greenberg et al., 2016) including a drastic drop in teachers who feel the stress of their job is worth it from 81 % to 42 % over the last 15 years (Kraft & Lyon, 2022), 78 % of teachers having thoughts of leaving or in the process of leaving the field (Reinke et al., 2025), a 30 % drop in those enrolling in teacher preparation programs over the last 12 years, and a stagnation in teacher salaries after accounting for inflation over the last 10 years despite an increase in their educational attainment over the same period (Irwin et al., 2023). The term "moral injury" (Shay, 2014; Griffin et al., 2019) defined as "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (Litz et al., 2009; p. 697) has been applied to trauma-heavy vocations such as veterans, police, and child welfare staff, but these disturbing trends speak to the accuracy of this definition for teachers as well.

The reasons for the profession that prepares people for all others decidedly being in a state of crisis and moral injury are numerous and complex, but include reverberations from punitive education reform efforts (Love, 2019, 2023; Ravitch, 2020), lack of support for educating an increasingly diverse society (Goodwin, 2020), schools getting caught in the middle of political, religious, and cultural wars (Zimmerman, 2022), increasing expectations for schools and teachers amidst inadequate and inequitable public funding (Baker, 2021), and a youth mental health crisis from before the pandemic and worsening since, which schools frequently bear the brunt of without adequate resources to help (Bommersbach et al., 2023; Irwin et al., 2023; US Surgeon General, 2021), to name a few.

Of course, stress and wellness interventions for teachers cannot solve these problems and multiple layers of societal change are required, but evidence shows that the "thimble full" of relief adult SEL interventions can provide nevertheless makes a meaningful difference in the meantime, both for teachers and their students (e.g., Beames et al., 2023; Jennings et al., 2017; Roeser et al., 2022; Vesely-Maillefer & Saklofske, 2018). It was important to us as the developers and facilitators of the SELove series to provide a space of at least acknowledgement of, and ideally a path to healing from, the emotional neglect that the teachers themselves had likely experienced in at least one major sphere of their life.

Adaptations to Hawaiian culture

Like developmental science more broadly, SEL specifically has also been called upon to break out of the "WEIRD" problem (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) (Chowkase, 2023), or the false assumption that Western-based values are either acultural or the only correct ones. Recent efforts have focused on creating a new generation of culturally sustaining SEL programs and approaches for the

dual purposes of nurturing the full humanity of increasingly diverse populations in schools even within WEIRD societies, as well as to make specific cultural and local adaptations to SEL programs where appropriate (Bintliff et al., 2024; Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020; Meland & Brion-Meisels, 2024; Vera, 2023).

Hawai'i has a rich culture derived in part from Native Polynesian and Pacific Islander traditions, a multi-layered history of brutal colonialism, and an ongoing struggle with harmful overtourism (Fisher, 2015) that are far beyond the capacity of this article to do justice to. Yet, we would be remiss to not acknowledge the substantial ways in which this backdrop indeed overlaps with SEL and how it might be approached, and therefore was forefront in our minds when developing this partnership. Knowing the collectivist culture of Native Hawai'i, some colleagues wondered whether an SEL series might be unnecessary at best, or tone deaf and harmful at worst. We worried about this too, but early conversations with our local partners (leaders in the early childhood community including public and private preschool consortia as well as bachelor's programs in early childhood education) suggested that Hawaiian teachers had many of the same modern-day struggles as those from mainland U.S., including serving an increasingly diverse population, as well as one with higher prevalence of child mental health and behavior challenges and greater barriers for families to help face such challenges, such as widening social inequities and parents' own mental health struggles (Armitage et al., 2024).

Despite its cultural strengths and resilience, Hawai'i is certainly no exception to histories of intergenerational trauma and poverty, as well as the unique impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. Our most recent SELove cohort started two weeks after the Maui fires of 2023 (see www.mauirecovers.org for resources and information), necessitating a shift in timing and emphasis of the content related to trauma, resilience, and physiological regulation and co-regulation. While we are under no delusions that an SEL series could adequately ameliorate such complex legacies, partnership stakeholders believed it could provide some long overdue acknowledgement and healing to a community of teachers whose needs had heretofore been overlooked, perhaps precisely because of the perception that they "wrote the book" on social and emotional concerns.

While the primary content of SELove had been developed prior to this particular project, we consulted with our local partners at the beginning of the partnership and throughout, visited local schools during our intentionally limited trips to Hawai'i, including some that taught from a native Hawaiian tradition and language, and included aspects of Hawaiian culture in both method and content. A Native Hawaiian participant from the first cohort of the series noted that the way we defined "SELove," emphasizing seeing children's full humanity, was very aligned with "the spirit of Aloha", including the sense of reverence, respect, cherishment, and protection held for children (keiki) in Hawaiian culture. A key component of the model that we will highlight further below, reflective insight circles, have been noted by some participants as sharing characteristics with Native Hawaiian "councils", including the rituals of *Ho'oponopono*, or the group practice of setting things right (Paglinawan & Paglinawan, 2012). We frequently used the Hawaiian words for children (keiki), teachers (kumu), family ('ohana) and of course, thank you (mahalo).

In addition, we incorporated Hawaiian imagery into our slide presentations, created mindfulness exercises around Hawaiian nature such as the banyan tree, and enhanced our traditional content of self-care and self-compassion with a module on *mālama*, or community care. We defined mālama as a process and practice of living into our humanity and belonging for our collective health and wellbeing, which includes interacting with and giving back to the natural world. It is perhaps not surprising that these adaptations, like others that have intended to honor more collectivist cultural traditions, included aspects of community care and care for the planet (e.g., Chowkase, 2023; Bintliff et al., 2024). As a tribute to how SEL and mālama can both highlight our interrelatedness with the human and more-than-human world, the concluding SELove session included a facilitated *shinrin yoku* (forest bathing) experience with Hawai'i's first certified forest therapy guide, Phyllis Look. The gentle practice of forest bathing encompasses many of the themes we discuss throughout the series such as mindfulness, reflection, gratitude, and self-regulation, allowing for the seeds of integration to be planted beyond the conclusion of the series. While these initial adaptations were inspired by Hawaiian culture, we can imagine the process of local adaptations being broadly applicable, as well as some of the specific content developments that expanded our view of SEL.

SELove series content and structure

The title *SELove* was co-created with teachers, and we clarify in the training that it refers not to parental love, but a love for the full humanity of each adult and child in the classroom. The series is neither a manualized SEL program with activities for children, nor is it strictly adult-facing. It is an "in between" approach that helps answer the questions: Whom do I want to be and how do I want to feel when I am teaching and interacting with students? How do I want to "show up" for myself and my students each day? The child-centered content focuses on understanding and reframing all child behavior as making sense and expressing needs. At the same time, we address that children's behaviors can be vexing and draining for teachers, and that these reactions also make sense and suggest a need in themselves. The adult-centered content focuses on practices for self-care and self-regulation (e.g., mindfulness practices, self-compassion exercises), cultivating radical honesty and self-awareness around the challenges of teaching, both systemic and personal, and developing a non-judgmental approach to their and their peers' professional growth, i.e., experimenting with new practices in a no-stakes, shame-free environment.

Overall, the approach underscores that "SEL happens when communities embody children's safety, worth, belonging, and joy. When this zigzaggy journey follows mismatches with curiosity and repair, we can embrace our humanity – not our perfection – as the key to unlock everything children need to learn, and become their most whole, true selves" (Module 1, SELove). In other words, we support teachers' understanding that their own liberation and that of their students is "bound up" together (Watson, 1985). Specific strategies are offered and co-created with each cohort to embody these lofty principles in the real world (see Table 1).

In terms of structure, the series was administered primarily synchronously online, bookended by two in-person, day-long sessions (with the exception of 2021, when the program was administered 100 % remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Each module "cycle" consists of 1) a 2.5-h facilitated workshop with slide presentation, activities, and small group work; 2) teachers selecting a strategy out of options provided to implement and practice for approximately one month in between modules (examples of options for strategies they could practice are provided in Table 1); 3) teachers filling out "reflective practice sheets" online once per week (so, approximately four times in between modules) to document their reflections, progress, and challenges with implementing the strategy; 4) coaches responding online to each reflective practice sheet entry to underscore strengths and encourage continued progress; and 5) a 1-h synchronous meeting with a subgroup of participants (approximately 7 members maximum per group) we call "reflective insight circles" (RICs), which are detailed further below. The final, in-person session, in addition to the content module of Community Care/ Mālama and session of forest bathing also includes a "Celebration of Learning," in which participants display their own videos (slide presentation with voiceover) documenting highlights of their learning journey, and share reflective feedback with one another on these videos.

In the subsections below, we go into greater depth on three elements of the program we believe have proven to be especially critical to the development of adult SEL in the participants. In order to platform participant voices with greater depth than is typically captured in open-ended evaluation survey questions, and with greater specificity to the

Table 1
Description of SELove content modules and example practice strategies.

Module Title	Brief Description	Example Strategy
What and Why SEL?	Defines SEL and how it is different from behavior management, the importance of elevating our social-emotional "instincts" from implicit to explicit, why the term love is used and what it has to do with school, SEL myth- and barrier-busting.	*Secure Base:* Teachers practice noticing how the children respond to them as a secure base by collecting examples of children refueling from interactions with them, as well as those who might do so less.
Mindfulness for Educators and Children	Defines mindfulness, the importance of cultivating self-awareness, pausing, reflecting, and developing a non-judgmental stance, how it is relevant to the classroom and the act of teaching, practicing "mindfulness in many ways", several exercises for adults and children and practicing together.	*Mindfulness for You:* Teachers make a minimum commitment to their mindfulness practice (2–10 min/day). Guidance is provided including how to support a non-judgmental stance, choosing physical locations to be mindful, and noticing changing levels of "noise" in their heads.
Brain-Based Responsive Teaching	Emphasizes the connection of neuroscience to children's struggles in the classroom. Through the trauma-responsive lens of Dr. Bruce Perry's 3 R's (relate, regulate, reason), this module focuses on a relational approach to addressing students' dysregulation and examines why trauma-responsive teaching is good for all. The importance of self-regulation and attunement in connecting during these challenging times in the classroom is also highlighted.	*Regulate, Relate, Reason:* When student upsets happen, teachers practice slowing themselves down and NOT proceeding to the "reason" step, for at least the first two weeks of implementation. Guiding questions are provided to support teachers in avoiding the rush to "the upstairs brain" – theirs or their students'.
Self-Care and Self-Compassion	Addresses the high demands of teachers to model good self-regulation, even when they are feeling depleted. Self-care and compassion are not selfish, and are critical for well-being and efficacy in or outside of the classroom. Emphasizes replacing self-criticism with kindness as well as how they can use their own moments of imperfection as authentic learning moments for children. Consistent with modern conceptualizations of self-care, the module includes discussion of boundary-setting, advocacy, power, and protest.	*Take Care of Yourself:* Teachers choose from a variety of options to practice self-care such as "rise and shine" (ritualizing their morning through meditation, journaling, walking, etc.) or "Sleep – seriously!" in which they are encouraged to ritualize bedtime and commit to at least 8 h of sleep.
Mindful Behavior Guidance	Introduces the Reframe, Consider, Say strategy, which supports educators in pausing to see challenging behaviors as uncommunicated needs and positive attributes of the child. It then challenges teachers to consider a "radical" and non-traditional solution to addressing the child's struggles.	*Be Radical:* Teachers are encouraged to ask themselves "would the world stop turning if…?" as they consider responding to behavior challenges in the classroom with "radical" strategies such as joining a loud child in making a lot of noise.
Using SEL to Reimagine Family-School Connection	Explores the needs and invaluable cultural skills and knowledge all families possess and how teachers can address and highlight these through family engagement. Teachers also learn simple and practical scripts to share with parents on how to address behavioral struggles. Acknowledges that parents have had their own experiences with schooling that may make them more or less willing to engage.	*Supporting Caregiver Needs throughout the School Year:* Using Marshall Rosenberg's "Inventory of Needs," teachers come up with 3–5 pairings of parent needs and corresponding practices to try.
Community Care/ Mālama – Celebration of Learning	Discusses what it does/would look like in our schools if we all "had each other's back", protected and cared for one another, and what children and adults would see and feel in the classroom if mālama were being practiced.	(Final module)

three curricular elements we highlight (vs. general module feedback), we invited two participants from the program to be named authors. The call-out quotes at the end of each of the three sections below are new, solicited writings from the two participant authors, not qualitative data collected as part of program evaluation. As such, we allow their writings to speak for themselves as we do for any member of the writing team. There is also more typical qualitative data from all the participants, coded and interpreted, presented in the "Preliminary Program Evaluation" section.

Reflective insight circles

> Have you ever noticed what happens when you really listen to another person or to a creature rustling in the brush at night or the wind moving in the trees, listen without reacting or even the intention to respond, listen without being influenced by long-held images and memories or firmly held positions, listen instead with a beginner's mind and the ears of a child hearing a bedtime story? (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1993; p. 5)

The Indigenous and First Nations practice of council draws from the integrative ways that humans and more-than-humans interact through intimacy, trust, and in community (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1993). Reflective Insight Circles (RICs) are intentional community spaces (virtual, in our case) that promote a similar kind of listening with presence, purposeful silence, and moments of gratitude without needing to fix, help, or save another. In most listening within everyday life, we tend to listen in more "directive" ways, by offering advice or our own stories (Palmer, 2009). RICs serve a different purpose, operating on the assumption that we need communities that invite us to recognize and amplify our own inner teacher. We aim for the RIC experience to encourage accountability as members attune to each other's stories and entrust each other with challenges and celebrations of all sizes from the unique contexts of the classroom, teachers' lounge, family home, and community.

In response to stories of practice from a "focus person" (e.g., coping with challenging behavior from a child, the tension between workload and family care, facing impossible demands from administration), the RIC group engaged in core practices including deep listening and presence, contemplation and silence, mirroring, and skillful question asking. We developed a full practice guide devoted to what it means to participate as part of the listening community. The guide alerts participants to the downsides of what may be the first instincts to respond such as commiserating (can exaggerate the dilemma, as in, "Oh my gosh, that's horrible!"); consoling, (can minimize by sugar coating as in, "I'm sure you're doing the best you can and everything will be ok"); or offering advice (can reinforce the person's self-doubt as in, "Did you try__?")

Instead, participants are guided to begin with mirroring, as exemplified by prompts such as "I heard you say__" or "I noticed when you talked about __, you slowed down and seemed sad." After mirroring, a variety of strategies are practiced by the facilitator and peers including focusing on feelings, adding perspective, magical/radical/absurd thinking, worst case scenario, and "what would ___ do?", all of which are intended to support the focus person in reframing, seeing with fresh eyes, cultivating self-compassion, and becoming unstuck.

Each RIC group met in between each module, which amounted to a frequency of approximately every other month throughout a year (6–7 times total) for a duration of 60 min each. There are three roles within the RIC: facilitator, focus person (1–2 per session), and reflecting community, and ideally, RICs contain one facilitator and six to eight participants. The focus people come prepared with a question, issue, or story to discuss related to their experiences over the past 1–2 months trying out strategies and reflecting on them in writing with their coach. Table 2 describes the structure of the reflective sequence during the RICs.

RIC facilitators saw competencies develop in teachers including greater attunement to the present moment, sharper awareness about difficult feelings and their associated body sensations, greater consideration of how to integrate wisdom from their ancestors into their teaching practice, increased discernment among options for action, and greater calm in challenging moments. Importantly, the common humanity witnessed in each other allowed teachers to lessen their burden by seeing the difficulty of their situation rather than continuing to experience themselves as incapable. Following are the participant authors' descriptions of their learnings from the RICs:

> *I could see burdens and stress being lifted off of the shoulders of those who presented during the RICs and it provided all of us the opportunity to practice SELove with one another in real time. It made using new practices in the classroom much easier. I was able to transfer the same "listener" mentality to my interaction with keiki, by allowing them time and space to share their "story" on their quest to feeling heard and accepted. Deep down, we all want to be heard regardless of age, gender, or culture.* – Participant author Raelen

> *I understand the importance of reflective listening with my keiki, but I didn't connect how myself and many of the adults I communicate with are lacking this skill with each other. It was enlightening to realize how much I needed this kind of reflective skill in my life! To actively practice the very opposite of what I know was challenging and awkward at first. In the first circle, my brain froze up and I couldn't get it to wrap around not offering advice or solving the problem. Now, I often recall the feeling of lightness it gave me to release myself from that fixer role, while still a work in progress, it is getting easier and easier.* – Participant author Abbie

Table 2
Sequence of activities for reflective insight circles.

Activity	Duration
Grounding/mindful arrival practice	5 min
Focus person #1 shares their prepared issue. Peers listen with curiosity, lack of judgment, and openness to the story.	7 min
Peers mirror what was said, seen, or felt and ask clarifying questions for the focus person. The focus person can respond if they want to.	5–6 min
Silence	2 min
Peers offer gratitude and encouragement in a word, phrase, or image.	4 min
Focus person offers brief reflection, reframing of initial issue, and/or any insights gained.	2–3 min
All/any can honor what has been shared.	1 min
Off-camera break and mindful re-arrival to "let go" of first story and become available for the next.	5 min
Focus person sequence repeats for focus person #2	22 min
Facilitator guides "stepping outside" of circle to reflect on the process.	5 min

Messages from childhood

A lesson we call "Messages from Childhood," which comes early in the series, is intended to support teachers in reflecting upon how their upbringing – especially with respect to narratives around childhood, children, emotions, and relationships – may be impacting their teaching today. The lesson makes clear that the purpose of this reflecting is not to dismiss the messages we learned as children, but rather to make the implicit explicit so that we can "pick and choose" with discernment instead of having old narratives driving our behavior unconsciously. The lesson starts with a poll asking participants to indicate whether they "remember hearing or learning" a series of more negative messages from adults during their childhood (e.g., "You don't get into 'reasons' for rules with children, because then they just argue with the reasons," or "Adults don't make mistakes and they don't apologize to children.") Regardless of the context, there tends to be a high level of endorsement of each item, between approximately 40–80 % of participants. Next, we present a contrasting set of behaviors such as adults solving problems calmly and lovingly, adults tolerating negative emotions in themselves and others, and adults giving and receiving feedback gently and non-defensively, and ask the group to silently reflect on how regularly they feel they witnessed such behaviors.

We continue with a discussion to add nuance to these opposites, and explain that although parents overwhelmingly love their children and the vast majority do not commit abuse or neglect (Centers for Disease Control, 2024), neither are the most evolved forms of emotional intelligence (e.g., high-quality modeling of self-regulation, self-expression, repairing of ruptures, or setting healthy boundaries) widely prevalent in the generations that are parents to adult children today (Cabello et al., 2021). One message that tends to garner a rich discussion is "Playing and relaxing are encouraged, but you have to do your duties first (e.g., chores, homework)." This message is almost universally endorsed as having been "in the water" during these adult participants' childhoods, which makes sense since the adults in all cultures help prepare their children for the discipline required in adulthood. Although the notion is not distinctly negative per se, the presentation of it in this new light supports teachers in considering how an extreme enactment of the message could morph into requiring children to "earn their joy." While there isn't a single definitive practice that derives from the Messages from Childhood lesson, the point is to bring the awareness of underlying narratives to consciousness, understand oneself better, and make more intentional choices about whether to preserve, let go of, or somewhat alter the messages when we interact with our students. Below are the descriptions from our participant authors of how Messages from Childhood manifested for them:

> *It was very much a part of my childhood messages to make sure everything was done before relaxing and playing. As SELove gently led us to examine these messages, I began asking myself, "why do I need this child to do my particular thing before they continue to engage in the thing that is bringing absolute joy and light to their being right now?!" or instead of looking around at all the things I think need to get done, "what is the worst thing that will happen, if that thing doesn't get done right now?" I realized that even though I am an adult, I still worry that an authority figure is going to scold me if I don't meet their expectations. That was a truth bomb that I choked on a bit. I don't want to pass that same worry to the next generation, so I choose to find more balance. I ask myself to consider first what I am feeling and be curious about the why, then I pause and reflect to make a plan that feels more intentional.* – Participant author Abbie

> *"You're crying? I'll give you something to cry about" or "Be seen, and not heard" were two of the most emotionally suppressing phrases I heard as a child. I was so used to having order and obedience as a child that I had to really prepare myself to jump into the Be Radical strategy knowing that my expectations would not be met, almost like lowering my standards. It was very uncomfortable for me to do at first, but I have seen that this strategy has lessened the power struggle I see with a couple of the keiki*

during large group settings. Ironically, by letting go of expectations that had been ingrained in me as a child, I felt like I was more in control of the situation and really opening up the opportunity to help the keiki regulate. – Participant author Raelen

Shadow work

In studies across the globe, reasons teachers identify for choosing this profession are dominated by altruistic motives such as wanting to make a positive difference in the next generation, wanting to support children's development, and a desire to help children (Bergmark et al., 2018). It is perhaps nowhere truer than in the early education space that teachers also experience expectations from themselves and others to *like* children. Intellectually, teachers understand that finding their job challenging or draining at times does not mean that they do not like children, or that they are violating their altruistic motives but emotionally, these concepts become difficult to disentangle. Over the years of working with teachers we have found that the image of the idealized teacher who feels positively towards all children all of the time creates undue pressure on teachers, and presents a barrier to their authentic professional growth.

Thus, we began incorporating methods inspired by Jung's concept of "shadow", which he defined as the "hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior or guilt-laden" (Jung, 1959; p. 99) part of ourselves. Not surprisingly, Jung also believed that the only way to achieve genuine development and liberate ourselves from our shadow is to embrace and integrate it. He is quoted as saying, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious." (Jung, 1967; p. 335). In the present context, "imagining figures of light" would be attempting to force oneself to become "more like" the perpetually sweet and calm idealized (i.e., non-existent) teacher. In the SELove training, we thus designed several activities with what some have called "shadow work"[1]; in mind (although we do not use the term explicitly), to support teachers in "making friends with" the guilt and shame that may arise as part of their jobs, especially when it comes to admitting any kind of negative feelings toward children, thereby breaking out of the constraints of the false ideal.

One example of shadow work was an exercise called "Identify Your Triggers." We ask teachers to think about a child phrase or behavior that bothers them and triggers some kind of negative feeling inside. Next, teachers are asked to come up with funny, exaggerated, or extreme examples of how "the worst teacher on their worst day" might react to that trigger. We may use humor to illustrate further by saying something like, "If the Wicked Witch of the West were cast in a movie as a teacher, how would she react to that trigger?" Supporting teachers in playing with absurdity as well as having them project their reaction on someone else are both tactics that support shadow work, i.e., ease approaching of the negative. Teachers then share these examples with one another during small group discussions and are provided with guidance to think of ways that they relate to and empathize with this "worst teacher", focus on how it feels in their body when they imagine themselves in that role, and share with peers what it felt like to hear others' triggers and worst reactions. The exercise, along with continued reflections and coaching throughout the following month, are intended to build greater empathy towards themselves and their peers, notice attempts to tamp down or suppress the dark side when it arises, and replace them instead with first, self-compassion and second, brainstorming alternative means or settings for "offloading" their natural, negative reactions. Below are the writings of our participant authors reflecting on how they used shadow work in their practice:

I didn't like hearing NO from keiki and adults, but learning to speak NO and allowing keiki to do so also was liberating for me. Chains were broken and stress and burdens lifted. Taking time to really understand myself and the triggers that turn on the "fight" mode in me, helped to break down the walls that presented a facade that I could do everything and be perfect. – Participant author Raelen

This year, rest time was very triggering for me because we had a group of children who were unable to settle. There was a lot of outward pressure to get the kids to sleep and the mindful tools at my disposal weren't working. My dark side came out often and I found myself really dreading that time of day. With the help of SELove instead of trying to avoid that feeling or feel guilty, I talked about it with my co-teachers, the parents and the children. I embraced it. It felt liberating to admit that I really didn't like rest time with children this year. I also realized, due to our very conflicting education system, how much I judge others for not being the idealized teacher. Ooof! Being conscious of that has allowed me to see some of the "wicked witch" reactions of my coworkers with a lot more grace and empathy, offering them support to embrace that dark side instead of internalized judgement. Humor and reflective listening have proven to be helpful tools in doing this! – Participant author Abbie

Preliminary program evaluation

SELove participants were a highly experienced and educated group, with 62.5 % being teachers for 10 years or more and 76.6 % having a Bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of race/ethnicity, we allowed participants to select multiple identity categories, and the top three were: 57.8 % Asian, 34.4 % White, and 26.6 % Native Hawaiian. As this project was funded as a professional development initiative and not a research study, we did not employ a comparison or control group, but nevertheless conducted a preliminary pre-post evaluation effort to acquire a level of promise of the program beyond just participant satisfaction. Across three cohorts, a maximum of 64 participants filled out pre- and post-surveys to assess changes in knowledge, perceptions of their skills, confidence, and practices related to the program, as well as post-only questions about satisfaction with the program. All items were written for the present project, with the exception of selected subscales from "Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers" from the American Institutes for Research (Yoder, 2014), which was designed to help teachers self-examine their skills in creating positive SEL culture in the classroom and in teaching SEL skills to students (social teaching practices).

In order to assess the social desirability effects common in self-report and program satisfaction surveys, we included some "neutral" items that we did not expect the program to impact. Examples of such items were frequency of reading books, talking about the weather during circle time, and the use of music or dancing. As hoped, all neutral items showed non-significant pre-post change, suggesting that participants were not indiscriminately selecting higher scale numbers at post-test. There were also three negative items that we hoped to see a decrease in, i.e., frequency of raising your voice, using time-out, and using sticker charts, stoplight charts, or other visible forms of management/reward systems. While all three items did decrease as hoped, the changes were not statistically significant, likely because they started out at near-floor levels.

The remaining results for the evaluation surveys are displayed in Table 3. As shown, all items or scales showed change in the positive/desired direction, and these changes were largely statistically significant. One key item tested knowledge, and was based on Ross Greene's concept of "kids do well if they can" (Greene & Ablon, 2005). The correct answer, which was selected significantly more by post-test, reflects teachers' understanding that children's ability to behave well relates to their momentary capacity to do so, not to their willfulness, knowledge

[1] A different usage of the term "shadow work" refers to "invisible labor", as in the "shadow work" of being a university faculty, an aunt, or a teleworker. We intend the Jung-inspired usage, as in the "work" involved in integrating the dark side of oneself.

Table 3
Preliminary evaluation results.

	Pre Mean (SD)	Post Mean (SD)	P
Knowledge (% correct)			
"Kids do well if they can."	.48 (.50)	.67 (.47)	.04*
Frequency of Activities			
Do mindfulness exercises	2.26 (1.31)	3.33 (.88)	.001**
Do yoga	1.73 (1.32)	2.23 (1.21)	.04*
Greet each child as they arrive	1.73 (1.32)	4.00 (.01)	.000***
Ask children to tell individual stories about home	2.93 (1.08)	3.21 (.71)	.12
Discuss emotions during the morning meeting	3.03 (1.13)	3.50 (.62)	.007**
Tell the children about your own feelings	3.02 (1.06)	3.46 (.68)	.01**
Engage in "emotion talk" with your co-teacher or other adult/s in the presence of children	1.84 (1.32)	2.15 (1.46)	.25
Social and Emotional Competencies Self-Assessment			
Warmth and support	3.86 (.89)	4.31 (.71)	.004**
Social teaching practices	2.73 (.56)	3.29 (.37)	.001**
Confidence around SEL			
How confident do you feel in your implementation of SEL? (1–4 scale)	2.60 (.80)	3.49 (.55)	.001**
Program Satisfaction			
This program helped expand my teaching skills.	–	3.78 (.61)	–
I gained new strategies.	–	3.68 (.70)	–
I learned new knowledge to support my practices.	–	3.66 (.70)	–
I was inspired to try new things in my classroom.	–	3.75 (.67)	–
I was offered an opportunity to share my experience.	–	3.81 (.64)	–
I had a chance to have my questions answered.	–	3.69 (.69)	–
The content was delivered at a comfortable pace.	–	3.66 (.70)	–
I would recommend this program to others.	–	3.78 (.66)	–

Notes. Pre-test n = 62; post-test n = 49. We used summary t-tests rather than paired in order to maximize sample size, due to an error with matching in the first cohort. Results are largely the same with paired t-tests when using only the available sample with matched data. For frequency of activities, the scale was: 1 = never, 2 = rarely (a few times per year), 3 = occasionally (2–3x/month), 4 = somewhat regularly (1–2x/week), 5 = very regularly (3–5x/week). For the social and emotional competencies self-assessment, the warmth and support scale was: 1 = I do not implement this practice, 2 = I struggle to implement this practice, 3 = I implement this practice reasonably well, 4 = I implement this practice well, 5 = I implement this practice extremely well. The social teaching practices and program satisfaction scales were both: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

about the rules, or motivation. We believe this item, despite it regarding children on its face, actually represents an important aspect of adult SEL, because holding a more accurate narrative about what underlies children's behavior helps adults to regulate their emotions and have greater empathy for children and themselves during challenging episodes.

Five out of seven items assessing frequency of classroom activities demonstrated statistically significant increases by post-test, with key items related to adult SEL including engaging in mindfulness exercises and teachers discussing their own emotions with children. The warmth and support scale includes items such as "I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye contact, greeting each child by name)" and "I display to my students that I care about how and what they learn." The social teaching practices subscales include items such as "I successfully support positive emotions and respond to negative emotions during social teaching practices." and "I understand how student responses (positive and negative) affect my emotions and my behaviors during social teaching practices." Both of these scales demonstrated statistically significant improvements, despite the relatively high endorsements (i.e., above the scales' mid-points) already existing by pre-test.

Furthermore, teachers rated their overall confidence in implementing SEL significantly higher at post-test than at pre-test, and their post-program satisfaction was always rated above 3.6 on average out of 4. Although all satisfaction items were rated close to the scale's ceiling, among the highest means were those that could be considered especially relevant to adult SEL such as "I was offered an opportunity to share my experience" and "This program helped expand my teaching skills". Anecdotally, a few teachers from each cohort have reported to us that their experiences in the SELove program prevented them from leaving the profession.

Open-ended responses were also collected after each module and RIC, with the prompt: "What did you learn about your teaching practice, your students, and/or yourself during the session?" For the present purposes, we qualitatively analyzed all 105 substantive post-session feedback statements, the results of which are presented in Table 4. Researchers used grounded theory and the steps of constant comparison (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to define categories that emerged as recurring themes. Team discussion was used to determine that saturation had been reached with the five coding categories shown, three of which most explicitly seem to forefront the program's support of participants' adult SEL: *Shared struggles/experiences*, *self-care/self-compassion*, and *personal insight*. Their statements consistently showed recognition of their own humanity and imperfections, which in turn seemed to empower them to keep going and see the fruits of their labor. Even in the other two categories that were less explicitly about themselves, *impact on practice with students* and *appreciation for the program*, the comments still reflected the parallel processes – between SELove's approach and themselves, and between themselves and their students – that underscore how teachers' own wellness and SEL skills are literally at the center of positive transformation in the classroom.

Finally, with the most recent cohort only ($n = 14$ for matched data, not reported in Table 3), we began assessing items that are ostensibly more focused on the potential generalizability of adult SEL effects beyond the classroom. Using items from the CAMS-R (Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale – Revised; Feldman et al., 2007), the reliability and validity of which has been recently re-established (Feldman et al., 2022), as well as our own items such as "I feel really stressed out" and "I am able to get a full night's sleep and wake up feeling refreshed", paired samples t-tests indicated no significant change in any item. The direction of non-significant mean changes was an increase for teachers' self-reported ability to concentrate, describe how they feel in the present moment, and choose a specific mindfulness practice for their own wellbeing, but the other 6 items stayed approximately the same (e.g., stress) or decreased (e.g., sleep, staying regulated during upsetting situations) by post-test. While a program such as this would of course not be expected to create instrumental changes in participants' life circumstances, these very initial null and skewing negative results may rather affirm the need for multi-systemic change to create the deep and wide healing for teachers to which we aspire.

Lessons learned and recommendations

At the conclusion of the third cohort of participants in SELove, program stakeholders met to review the quality improvements made over the three iterations of the partnership, take stock of what had been achieved, and discuss what we thought the early childhood education community in Hawai'i needed in terms of next steps. Taking together the preliminary evaluation information, deeper conversations with participant authors, and stakeholder meetings, we offer the following take-

Table 4
Summary of post-module learnings feedback statements.

Category	Frequency	Representative Quotes
Shared struggles/ experiences	22 %	"Knowing there are people who are going through the same challenges as I am makes me feel supported and encouraged to move forward." "I learned that we all share the same struggles in our experiences as teachers. I also learned how inspiring the other teachers are and that we can all learn and grow from each other and support one another." "I learned that I am not the only one who is experiencing feelings of exhaust, frustration, anxiety, helplessness, as well as feelings of triumph." "I hear feelings, situations, struggles, inner thoughts coming from someone else's mouth but seems as if they had been hand-picked from my own head. Even the people we may think are the strongest or kindest or we may think of as superheroes, are struggling with things we may not have ever known existed."
Self-care/ Self-compassion	15 %	"We need to remember to take care of ourselves too" "I am imperfectly human and we all make mistakes. I learned not to be hard on myself, as with students, we must give ourselves patience and understanding." "I need to forgive myself when I feel I failed and remember the times I have supported and nurtured my students." "I learned it was okay to make mistakes and that I need to be kind to myself." "I learned that we are all human and it's okay to give ourselves some grace in all areas of life not just teaching."
Impact on practice with students	21 %	"If I show more empathy the children will open up once they feel a sense of security and comfort. What I've learned about myself is that I, too, can feel shy and scared when thrown into an unknown situation and that once I feel comfortable, I can open up….the children are no different." "I'm engaging with my children more because I really see the value in building a relationship with them." "I learned that it is very important to know the child and my own limits too." "I have gained and used strategies that have made me feel better about myself. I have been able to help my students that are dealing with big emotions to use strategies to help themselves calm down." "I wasn't so quick to abandon the tactic when I stumbled at first. I decided to keep trying the breathing and in the end, my kiddos and I looked forward to it each day! I enjoyed the changing expressions on their faces as they were doing the breathing - such happiness!"
Personal insight	32 %	"I have more empathy and feeling than I thought I did. I feel like I come across as hard, but others saw feelings of care in me." "I learned to trust myself and to have confidence in what I feel is right." "I don't always have to have the answers, but that I can just listen to listen." "I am becoming more comfortable and confident in my role as lead teacher."
Appreciation for the program	10 %	"I'm really going to miss this group as it has been so motivating for me." "So many "ah-ha" moments! So much learning that I am grateful for!" "I appreciated how thoughtful and well-planned SELove was. The instructors were compassionate as well as passionate about the subject. Their ability to use reflective listening and language is inspiring to me! I never felt pressured other than from myself when I didn't get a reflective practice sheet turned in on time and that was helpful for my ability to continue."

Note. The selected quotes above come from post-module evaluation surveys with the following prompt: "What did you learn about your teaching practice, your students, and/or yourself during the session?"

home messages:

- **Honor, but do not idealize, traditions from collectivist cultures.** As discussed above, many SEL scholars and practitioners are rightly acknowledging and beginning to correct the WEIRD bias that exists in the SEL field, including emphasis on individualistic cultural values such as forthright self-expression, autonomy, and creativity, which are not central in collectivist cultures (Chen & Yu, 2022; Hayashi et al., 2022). However, we should avoid oversimplifying these differences, such as the notion that those within collectivist, relationally-oriented cultures like Hawai'i's do not need support with relational matters. Recent research has shown, in contrast to the stereotype that "collectivist cultures do not 'need' autonomy, because duty and deference to authority are prioritized in their value systems" (Bradshaw et al., 2024; p. 4), that in fact parental autonomy support predicts child well-being and parental psychological control predicts child ill-being regardless of culture, including collectivist cultures in the world region of Asia (Bradshaw et al., 2024). It was affirmed by both Raelen and Abbie's writings that experiences with authoritarian adults during their childhoods impacted them negatively in the past as well as in their current teaching, which they appreciated acknowledging and receiving support around during the program. Even considering the potential favorability to SEL of certain collectivist experiences, support is still needed, such as grappling with modern forces that work against interdependence. This lesson can be applied to SEL PD broadly, because instead of over-idealizing the strengths that adults bring to the table, PD facilitators can maximize the dual opportunities to 1) uncover neglected needs resulting from previous assumptions that participants "are fine" and/or 2) go even deeper in the areas in which their participants may be "advanced".
- **Embracing negative, or even taboo thoughts and feelings, may be required for meaningful transformation.** In both the "Messages from Childhood" and "Shadow Work" sections above, we highlighted some pre-designed opportunities in SELove to support participants in sitting with uncomfortable feelings and negative perceptions around their profession or children, but similar themes arose organically in all components of the program. There was a consistent affirmation of the idea that "the only way out is through," and that teachers felt a sense of relief after releasing some of their psychological burdens, even though it was difficult and counter-intuitive at first. Author Abbie wrote vividly about "choking on a truth bomb," which ultimately allowed her to choose balance, and author Raelen wrote poignantly of "breaking down walls of a façade," which ultimately liberated her from some of her stress and burdens. The lesson here is that, much in the same way teachers should support children's self-regulation, treat children's negative emotions as opportunities to connect and learn, and project confidence in children's ability to "do hard things," (Denham et al., 2012; Zinsser et al., 2014), PD facilitators too should embrace rather than avoid discomfort - participants' and their own – as a powerful means of disrupting the status quo and bringing about meaningful change.
- **Parallel processes of support and empathy are needed at all levels.** We saw the potency of parallel processes in all aspects of the

program, from the more deeply emotional aspects like those discussed above, to the more mundane and administrative aspects of the program, such as feedback routines and deadlines. As shown above, teachers repeatedly told us that the facilitators' flexibility, co-creation of expectations, and empathy for them had the dual effect of giving them more energy and motivation to continue in the program despite their busy-ness and stress, and creating more space for showing the same flexibility and empathy with their students. Raelen aptly wrote about being able to "transfer the listener mentality" to her students that she experienced during the RICs. As PD facilitators we must practice what we preach as well as lift up teachers' efforts to carry out a similar "moral consistency" in their classrooms.

- **Peer support may be critical for the deeply personal content of SEL.** All new content is challenging to implement, and teachers can always benefit from talking to peers about their struggles, learning curve, and "tips and tricks" (Van Veen et al., 2012). It is clear why this is likely even more important if your aim is to deepen adult SEL, given the potential intimacy and vulnerability of touchpoints that arise. We saw several references in participants' comments to the importance of both *witnessing* (e.g., hearing others' experiences "almost as if they had been hand-picked from my own head") and *being witnessed* (e.g., "I feel like I come across as hard, but others saw feelings of care in me"). Further evidence came from pre-written statements about possible benefits of the RICs we asked participants to choose from, and all of the top three most frequently endorsed benefits, which were selected more than 50 % of the time, related to this critical role of the peer community (e.g., "Broadening my perspective from hearing my peers' stories"). Infrequently endorsed benefits included "Learning that ECE professional practice is even deeper than I thought" (16 %) and interestingly, "Getting to know my peers better" (19 %), suggesting that making friends is not what matters the most about the peer community, but rather its role in giving participants' perspective about their own journeys. While causal research will be necessary to confirm, we suggest that the preliminary information gathered here would point to the natural and even necessary pairing of SEL training with some kind of structured peer community.

Finally, next steps for the partnership, derived from "What can we do to improve the program?" feedback as well as stakeholder meetings, largely centered around expanding the training. Ideas for responding to continued needs in their community of teachers included ongoing RICs throughout the academic year with SELove alums as the facilitators, a "part two" of SELove with more advanced practices, and a train-the-trainer model with local coaches conducting observations and live support in classrooms. However, our local partners also cautioned that they wanted the transfer of responsibility to be very gradual, and that they valued some kind of ongoing role for external facilitation and support. We affirm this need and will continue to reconcile two truths: It is important for us "outsiders" to show respect and humility, understanding that we do not have special abilities to "empower" communities that they didn't already have, and, a degree of ongoing partnership with external facilitators (like universities) confers certain advantages such as financial resources, the ability to focus on the longer term, and a fresh perspective. Since all the adults in the same context likely have at least some common sources for their stresses, the outsider perspective may allow for a type of validation that cannot be delivered by other insiders.

Conclusion

The education system is experiencing an unprecedented double-jeopardy, with a declared national emergency in youth mental health, and teacher job satisfaction at an all-time low and turnover at an all-time high. While this is clearly a crucial time for SEL to take hold, merely insisting that teachers carry out caring and supportive SEL "with fidelity," without at least acknowledging the moral injuries they experience is akin to "Do as we say, not as we do." We designed SELove not only to build SEL skills in teachers that would benefit children, but also to provide a reparative experience, and deliver a direct infusion of the same kind of nurturance and valuing of teachers' entire humanity that we hope they provide to children. Although not every module is an obvious connection to adult SEL, the learning process always centered the adult point of view, to embrace how SEL, perhaps different from academic subjects, arises from and impacts our "cellular" level. Pre-post data and participants' experiences suggest that, at least within the context of teaching itself, SELove promoted adults' SEL skills and confidence, and a lightening of their burdens. We were repeatedly humbled and impressed with the insights participants shared with us about their own growing self-reflectiveness, and desire to feel and do better as teachers while simultaneously letting go of the self-flagellation that can be a barrier to change. As we expand the training and devise ways to incorporate more peer and community leadership, we hope that the experiences we have described with our Hawai'i partnership thus far will serve as an inspiration in other locales and grade levels for how SEL can bring at least a "thimble full" of healing to teachers despite the troubling circumstances of the times.

Funding

This work was supported by the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Bajet Raelen: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Evans Anita:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Kontoudakis Maria:** Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Banashak Jeanette:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Moreno Amanda:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Laase Abbie:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

Conflict of Interest

None.

References

Armitage, J. M., Collishaw, S., & Sellers, R. (2024). Explaining long-term trends in adolescent emotional problems: What we know from population-based studies. *Discover Social Science and Health, 4*(1), 14.

Baker, B. D. (2021). *Educational inequality and school finance: Why money matters for America's students*. Harvard Education Press.

Beames, J. R., Spanos, S., Roberts, A., McGillivray, L., Li, S., Newby, J. M., & Werner-Seidler, A. (2023). Intervention programs targeting the mental health, professional burnout, and/or wellbeing of school teachers: systematic review and meta-analyses. In *Educational Psychology Review, 35* p. 26).

Beavers, A. (2009). Teachers as learners: Implications of adult education for professional development. *Journal of College Teaching Learning, 6*(7).

Bergmark, U., Lundström, S., Manderstedt, L., & Palo, A. (2018). Why become a teacher? Student teachers' perceptions of the teaching profession and motives for career choice. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 41*(3), 266–281.

Bintliff, A. V., Levine, R. S., Peninah, B., Namanda, Z., Ewaz, R. M., Cheung, W. W., & Love, J. (2024). Facilitating trauma-informed SEL with refugee youth in Uganda via an international research-practice partnership: Lessons learned from The Wellbeing Club. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy, 3*, Article 100041.

Bommersbach, T. J., McKean, A. J., Olfson, M., & Rhee, T. G. (2023). National trends in mental health–related emergency department visits among youth, 2011-2020. *JAMA, 329*(17), 1469–1477.

Botelho, N. (2021). Reflection in motion: An embodied approach to reflection on practice. *Reflective Practice, 22*(2), 147–158.

Bradbury, H., Frost, N., Kilminster, S., & Zukas, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Beyond reflective practice*. London: Routledge.

Bradshaw, E. L., Duineveld, J. J., Conigrave, J. H., Steward, B. A., Ferber, K. A., Joussemet, M., & Ryan, R. M. (2024). Disentangling autonomy-supportive and psychologically controlling parenting: A meta-analysis of self-determination theory's dual process model across cultures. *American Psychologist*.

Brown, J. L., Jennings, P. A., Rasheed, D. S., Cham, H., Doyle, S. L., Frank, J. L., & Greenberg, M. T. (2023). Direct and moderating impacts of the CARE mindfulness-based professional learning program for teachers on children's academic and social-emotional outcomes. *Applied Developmental Science*, 1–20.

Cabello, R., Gómez-Leal, R., Gutiérrez-Cobo, M. J., Megías-Robles, A., Salovey, P., & Fernández-Berrocal, P. (2021). Ability emotional intelligence in parents and their offspring. *Current Psychology*, 1–7.

Centers for Disease Control (2024). About child abuse and neglect. https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/about/index.html.

Chen, H., & Yu, Y. (2022). The impact of social-emotional learning: A meta-analysis in China. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 1040522.

Chowkase, A. A. (2023). Social and emotional learning for the greater good: Expanding the circle of human concern. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy, 1*, Article 100003.

Cipriano, C., Strambler, M. J., Naples, L. H., Ha, C., Kirk, M., Wood, M., & Durlak, J. (2023). The state of evidence for social and emotional learning: A contemporary meta-analysis of universal school-based SEL interventions. *Child Development, 94*(5), 1181–1204.

Cipriano, C., Ha, C., Wood, M., Sehgal, K., Ahmad, E., & McCarthy, M. F. (2024). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of universal school-based SEL programs in the United States: Considerations for marginalized students. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*, Article 100029.

Corcoran, R. P., Cheung, A. C., Kim, E., & Xie, C. (2018). Effective universal school-based social and emotional learning programs for improving academic achievement: A systematic review and meta-analysis of 50 years of research. *Educational Research Review, 25*, 56–72.

Curry, A., & Epley, P. (2021). Toward a reflection-centered model of graduate social work education: Implications for enhanced practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 41*(1), 57–76.

Dall'Alba, G. (2009). Learning professional ways of being: Ambiguities of becoming. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 41*(1), 34–45.

Dencev, H., & Collister, R. (2010). Authentic ways of knowing, authentic ways of being: Nurturing a professional community of learning and praxis. *Journal of transformative education, 8*(3), 178–196.

Denham, S. A., Bassett, H. H., & Zinsser, K. (2012). Early childhood teachers as socializers of young children's emotional competence. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 40*, 137–143.

Diamond, A. (2013). Want to optimize executive functions and academic outcomes? Simple, just nourish the human spirit. In *Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology: Developing cognitive control processes: Mechanisms, implications, and interventions, 37* pp. 203–230). Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432.

Durlak, J. A., Mahoney, J. L., & Boyle, A. E. (2022). What we know, and what we need to find out about universal, school-based social and emotional learning programs for children and adolescents: A review of meta-analyses and directions for future research. *Psychological Bulletin, 148*(11-12), 765.

Ergas, O., & Ritter, J. K. (Eds.). (2020). *Exploring self toward expanding teaching, teacher education and practitioner research*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Feldman, G., Hayes, A., Kumar, S., Greeson, J., & Laurenceau, J. P. (2007). Mindfulness and emotion regulation: The development and initial validation of the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R). *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment, 29*, 177–190.

Feldman, G., Westine, M., Edelman, A., Higgs, M., Renna, M., & Greeson, J. (2022). Cognitive and affective mindfulness scale-revised (CAMS-R). *Handbook of Assessment in Mindfulness Research*, 1–24.

Fisher, S. (2015). Hawaiian culture and its foundation in sustainability. *Thinking Like an Island: Navigating a Sustainable Future in Hawaii*, 7-27.

Garcia, A. (2019). A call for healing teachers: Loss, ideological unraveling, and the healing gap. *Schools, 16*(1), 64–83.

Ginwright, S. (2015). *Hope and healing in urban education: How urban activists and teachers are reclaiming matters of the heart*. Routledge.

Goodwin, A. L. (2020). Learning to teach diverse learners: Teachers and teacher preparation in the United States. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.

Greenberg, M. T., Brown, J. L., & Abenavoli, R. M. (2016). *Teacher stress and health effects on teachers, students, and schools*. Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University.

Greene, R. W., & Ablon, J. S. (2005). *Treating explosive kids: The collaborative problem-solving approach*. Guilford Press.

Griffin, B. J., Purcell, N., Burkman, K., Litz, B. T., Bryan, C. J., Schmitz, M., & Maguen, S. (2019). Moral injury: An integrative review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 32*(3), 350–362.

Hayashi, A., Liew, J., Aguilar, S. D., Nyanamba, J. M., & Zhao, Y. (2022). Embodied and social-emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood: Situating culturally relevant SEL in Asian, African, and North American contexts. *Early Education and Development, 33*(5), 746–763.

Irwin, V., Wang, K., Tezil, T., Zhang, J., Filbey, A., Jung, J., & Parker, S. (2023). Report on the condition of education 2023. NCES 2023-144rev. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Jennings, P. A., Brown, J. L., Frank, J. L., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Davis, R., & Greenberg, M. T. (2017). Impacts of the CARE for Teachers program on teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(7), 1010.

Jennings, P. A., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Rasheed, D., Frank, J. L., & Brown, J. L. (2019). Long-term impacts of the CARE program on teachers' self-reported social and emotional competence and well-being. *Journal of School Psychology, 76*, 186–202.

Jennings, P. A., Frank, J. L., Snowberg, K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2013). Improving classroom learning environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE): Results of a randomized controlled trial. *School Psychology Quarterly, 28*(4), 374.

Jung, C.G. (1959). Aion: Researches into the phenomenology of the self. In H. Read et al. (Eds.), *Collected works of C.G. Jung* (Vol. 9, Part II, pp. 1-266). Princeton University Press.

Jung, C.G. (1967). The philosophical tree. In H. Read et al. (Eds.), *Collected works of C.G. Jung* (Vol. 13, pp. 335-336). Princeton University Press.

Kotowski, S. E., Davis, K. G., & Barratt, C. L. (2022). Teachers feeling the burden of COVID-19: Impact on well-being, stress, and burnout. *Work (Preprint)*, 1–9.

Kraft, M. A., & Lyon, M. A. (2022). The rise and fall of the teaching profession: Prestige, interest, preparation, and satisfaction over the last half century. *Ed Working Paper No. 22-679*. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

Lipscomb, S. T., Hatfield, B., Lewis, H., Goka-Dubose, E., & Fisher, P. A. (2019). Strengthening children's roots of resilience: Trauma-responsive early learning. *Children and Youth Services Review, 107*, Article 104510.

Litz, B. T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nash, W. P., Silva, C., & Maguen, S. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review, 29*, 695–706.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon press.

Love, B. L. (2023). *Punished for dreaming: How school reform harms Black children and how we heal*. St. Martin's Press.

Mahfouz, J., & Anthony-Stevens, V. (2020). Why trouble SEL? The need for cultural relevance in SEL. *Occasional Paper Series, 2020*(43), 6.

Mahoney, J. L., Weissberg, R. P., Greenberg, M. T., Dusenbury, L., Jagers, R. J., Niemi, K., & Yoder, N. (2021). Systemic social and emotional learning: Promoting educational success for all preschool to high school students. *American Psychologist, 76*(7), 1128.

Markowitz, N. L., & Bouffard, S. M. (2022). *Teaching with a social, emotional, and cultural lens: A framework for educators and teacher educators*. Harvard Education Press.

Mart, A. K., Weissberg, R. P., & Kendziora, K. (2015). Systemic support for SEL in school districts. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice*. The Guilford Press.

Meland, E. A., & Brion-Meisels, G. (2024). An integrative model for culturally sustaining SEL in the classroom. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*, Article 100042.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Meyers, D. C., Domitrovich, C. E., Dissi, R., Trejo, J., & Greenberg, M. T. (2019). Supporting systemic social and emotional learning with a schoolwide implementation model. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 73*, 53–61.

Niemi, K. & Weissberg, R.P. (2017). Building a foundation for great teaching. In Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Kitil, M. J., & Hanson-Peterson, J. (2017). To Reach the Students, Teach the Teachers: A National Scan of Teacher Preparation and Social & Emotional Learning. A Report Prepared for CASEL. *Collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning*.

Paglinawan, R. K., & Paglinawan, L. K. (2012). Living Hawaiian rituals: Lua, hoʻoponopono, and social work. *Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being, 8*, 1–18.

Palmer, P. (2009). *A hidden wholeness: The journey toward an undivided life*. Jossey-Bass.

Perry, B. D. (2006). Fear and learning: Trauma-related factors in the adult education process. In S. Johnson, & K. Taylor (Eds.), *The neuroscience of adult learning: New directions for adult and continuing education* (pp. 21–27). John Wiley & Sons.

Ravitch, D. (2020). *Slaying Goliath: The passionate resistance to privatization and the fight to save America's public schools*. Vintage.

Regnier, R. (1994). The sacred circle: A process pedagogy of healing. *Interchange, 25*, 129–144.

Reid, S. (2024). *Humans who teach: A guide for centering love, justice, and liberation in schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Reinke, W. M., Herman, K. C., Stormont, M., & Ghasemi, F. (2025). Teacher stress, coping, burnout, and plans to leave the field: A post-pandemic survey. *School Mental Health*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-024-09738-7

Robinson, L. E., Valido, A., Drescher, A., Woolweaver, A. B., Espelage, D. L., LoMurray, S., & Dailey, M. M. (2022). Teachers, stress, and the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative analysis. *School Mental Health*, 1–12.

Roeser, R. W., Mashburn, A. J., Skinner, E. A., Choles, J. R., Taylor, C., Rickert, N. P., & Sorenson, J. (2022). Mindfulness training improves middle school teachers' occupational health, well-being, and interactions with students in their most stressful classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 114*(2), 408.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2002). *Nonviolent communication: A language of compassion*. Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer press.

Saltiel, D. (2012). Judgement, narrative and discourse: A critique of reflective practice. *Beyond reflective practice* (pp. 130–141). Routledge.

Santoro, D. A. (2021). *Demoralized: Why teachers leave the profession they love and how they can stay*. Harvard Education Press.

Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Hanson-Peterson, J. L., & Hymel, S. (2015). SEL and preservice teacher education. *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and Practice*, 406–421.

Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2017). Social and emotional learning and teachers. *The Future of Children*, 137–155.

Schonert-Reichl, K.A., Kitil, M.J., & Hanson-Peterson, J. (2017). To reach the students, teach the teachers: A national scan of teacher preparation and social & emotional learning. A Report Prepared for CASEL. *Collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning*.

Shay, J. (2014). Moral injury. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 31*, 182–191.

Sosa-Provencio, M. A., Sheahan, A., Desai, S., & Secatero, S. (2020). Tenets of body-soul rooted pedagogy: Teaching for critical consciousness, nourished resistance, and healing. *Critical Studies in Education, 61*(3), 345–362.

Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development, 88*(4), 1156–1171.

Tremmel, R. (1993). Zen and the art of reflective practice in teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review, 63*(4), 434–459.

Turner, W. (2023). *Embracing adult SEL: An educator's guide to personal social emotional learning success*. Taylor & Francis.

US Surgeon General. (2021). *Protecting youth mental health*. The US Surgeon General's Advisory [Internet].

Van Veen, K., Zwart, R., & Meirink, J. (2012). What makes Teacher professional development effective?: A literature review. *Teacher Learning That Matters*, 3–21.

Vera, E. M. (2023). Social emotional learning and cultural relevancy: Real world challenges. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 67*(4), 233–245.

Vesely-Maillefer, A. K., & Saklofske, D. H. (2018). Emotional intelligence and the next generation of teachers. *Emotional Intelligence in Education: Integrating Research with Practice*, 377–402.

Villanueva, S. T. (2013). Teaching as a healing craft: Decolonizing the classroom and creating spaces of hopeful resistance through Chicano-Indigenous pedagogical praxis. *The Urban Review, 45*, 23–40.

Watson, L. (1985, July 15-26). (Title unknown.) [Conference presentation]. Third World Conference on Women, Nairobi, Kenya.

Yoder, N. (2014). Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and. *Competencies*. American Institutes for Research, Center on Great Teachers and Leaders.

Zimmerman, J. (2022). *Whose America?: Culture wars in the public schools*. University of Chicago Press.

Zimmerman, J., & Coyle, V. (1993). *Introduction to the practice of council*. The Ojai Foundation. https://waysofcouncil.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Introduction-to-Council.pdf.

Zinsser, K. M., Shewark, E. A., Denham, S. A., & Curby, T. W. (2014). A mixed-method examination of preschool teacher beliefs about social–emotional learning and relations to observed emotional support. *Infant and Child Development, 23*(5), 471–493.