



Promoting Healthy Development of Young People: Outcomes Framework 2.0

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Background

In the summer of 2018, the Local Government Association (LGA) in England commissioned the Centre for Youth Impact to produce an outcomes framework to help partners across the English youth sector to develop and agree on mutual aims to support young people in their local areas. The work was in response to LGA's consultations that led to its vision statement described in the report, *Bright Futures: our vision for youth services*, published at the end of 2017. In that report, the authors noted:

“A clear outcomes framework can help to effectively monitor the impact of a service at key milestones to spot where things aren't working and provide opportunities to make changes where needed. It can also support evidence of collective impact across the system.”

The proposed framework was intended to support partners' efforts to track and understand the short-, medium-, and longer-term impacts of their work on the lives of young people. The framework needed to be simple and adaptable to provision for different groups of young people and for diverse approaches.

This document is an update¹ on the framework and is the result of two phases of work: an initial phase including desk research and widespread consultation with practitioners, commissioners and elected members, and a second phase to test the proposed framework in action. The work was undertaken by the Centre's network of regional impact leads and its central team.

A wide range of agencies and actors across England – and indeed further afield – contribute to provision for young people (defined here as between the ages of 13 and 19, or up to 25 for those with special education needs and/or disabilities). They include local authorities, public health and clinical commissioners, voluntary and community organisations, faith groups, criminal justice agencies, youth-led organisations, private and social enterprises, schools and colleges. The nature of provision differs dramatically; it can include open-access youth work in community settings and spaces; youth social action, campaigning and participation in decision-making; one-to-one support for young people with specific needs; uniformed youth provision; group work with young people who share particular backgrounds or experiences (such as young carers, LGBTQI young people, or young people with specific disabilities); structured programmes aimed at getting young people into work or developing financial capability; youth arts provision; sport for development; the provision of housing support; advice, guidance or counselling; outdoor and environmental education; and much more.

The Catalyst Framework Update

The *Catalyst Framework of Outcomes for Young People* (McNeil, Reeder, & Rich, 2012) was developed by the Young Foundation as one element of the work programme of the government-funded Catalyst Consortium. Although originally intended to be an impact framework to support a hoped-for expansion of social investment into youth provision, the Catalyst Framework of Outcomes coincided with (and eventually came to be defined by) a widespread concern that

¹ This technical report draws heavily from an open source working paper by QTurn (Peck, Smith, & Smith, 2019) that requires only this notification that any content appearing in the working paper may also appear here in identical or slightly altered form. The working paper is accessible at: www.qturngroup.com/MPCn

organisations working with young people, particularly ‘youth work,’ were not able to give a clear account of the impact of their work on the young people who participated in it. Extensive evidence on this topic was given to the Select Committee Inquiry into services for young people in 2010/11, and the Catalyst Framework of Outcomes for Young People (Framework 1.0) was positioned as part of Government’s response.

Framework 1.0 took as its starting point the emerging evidence that social and emotional skills play a key part in young people’s ability to make successful transitions to adulthood and achieve positive life outcomes including educational attainment, employment and good health. It was an attempt to make clear connections between what are often considered to be the short-term or ‘soft’ outcomes of provision for young people and the longer-term impacts.²

Framework 1.0 was well received by the youth sector, and many practitioners used it as the basis for defining and measuring the outcomes they hoped to achieve with young people. However, Framework 1.0 ultimately failed to make as great an impact on the sector as had been hoped, for a number of interlinked reasons (e.g., policy shifts, funding cuts, and sparse leadership).

Despite these challenges, the Centre for Youth Impact (created in 2014) embraced a leadership role and made significant inroads into engaging with the youth sector around the framework (e.g. through the Centre’s national and regional networks, events, trainings and publications). Framework 1.0 has been a core part of the Centre’s introductory training package for youth organisations and, through this medium, a wide range of public, voluntary and private sector organisations working with young people have gained an understanding of the value of Framework 1.0 and how it can be used to design and evaluate their work.

The LGA’s specification for an updated framework encouraged a revision of Framework 1.0 as an option. The Centre for Youth Impact has embraced this opportunity to revisit and update thinking about an ‘outcomes’ framework. Centre staff have listened to practitioners, commissioners and managers from across the youth sector who recognise the potential of an updated outcomes framework to underpin commissioning and provision of services.

Objectives

Through a stakeholder driven process, the following objectives clarified how a consensual outcomes framework could be helpful to the field:

1. Understand and share current research findings about young people’s development and key skills that help them to achieve outcomes.
2. Enable agencies and providers to innovate conditions in which young people can develop key skills.
3. Use common language and models, anchored in science, that can be easily understood by practitioners, commissioners and young people.
4. Provide a framework that can be used by local and national commissioners for collaborative, high quality, outcomes-based commissioning.

² The seven ‘clusters of capabilities’ in the original catalyst framework provided a common language for work with young people to help them build capacity and resilience. The framework was based on an extensive review of research and was applied across a wide range of provision for young people (e.g., informal and non-formal settings, targeted supports).

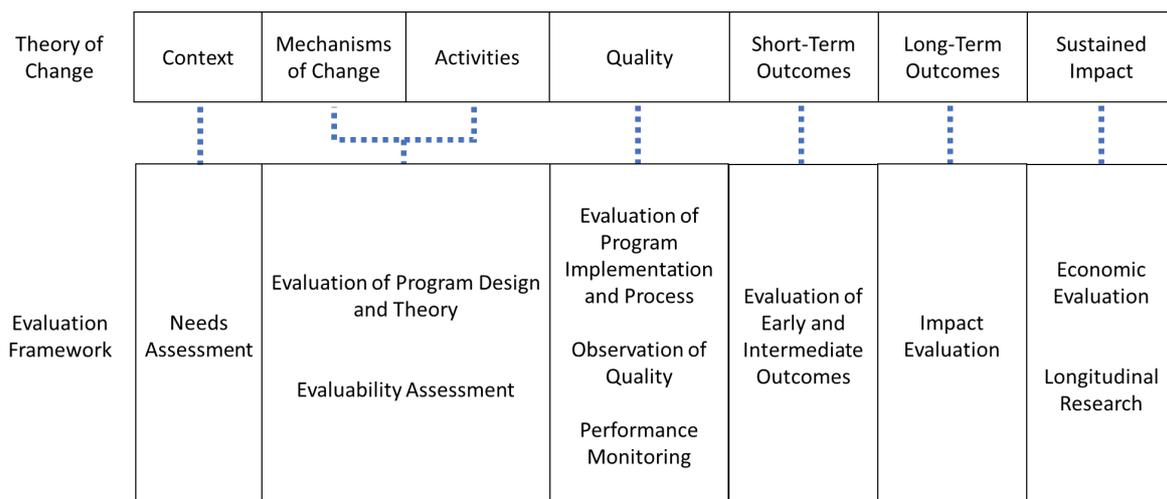
- Encourage organisations to reflect on, and plan for, how they continuously improve the quality of their youth services work to build skills and promote longer-term impacts.

Framework 2.0, described below, focuses on young people aged 13-19 (or up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities) and defines ‘provision for young people’ as non-formal and informal settings (i.e., not part of the formal education curriculum) that create opportunities to develop social and emotional learning (SEL) skills. It is relevant to open access work with young people in communities, youth voice and social action projects, and to targeted work with young people experiencing a wide range of needs and challenges. This includes both one-to-one and group-based approaches.

Integrated Tools

Outcomes frameworks, theories of change, evaluation designs, program practices and curricula, are inextricably interwoven. We found the diagram³ shown in Figure 1 helpful in understanding the extent to which an outcomes framework depends on a theory of change and supports a broad perspective on evaluation.

Figure 1. Linking a Theory of Change to an Evaluation Framework



An outcomes framework related systematically to a theory of change helps identify outcomes of value and their relation to one another. This integration can help to plan what, when, and where to evaluate. An outcomes framework integrated with a theory of change can also support the design of large scale and robust impact and economic evaluations, which are intended to measure the impact of provision on specific outcomes that are identified in advance.

In addition to the focus on youth outcomes, there should also be a close relationship between how a youth organisation thinks about *outcomes for young people* and how it thinks about *its own role* in contributing to those outcomes. For example, as programme staff (e.g. providers, managers, youth workers, and volunteers) work on improving the quality of settings and relationships, they should be supported by a larger professional learning community that facilitates access to professional development and networking opportunities; trainings focused on experiential

³ Adapted from the American Evaluation Association Needs Assessment Topical Interest Group blog (Hamann, 2019)

learning, SEL skill growth, and program planning; and methodological guidance for customising their outcomes framework, refining their theory of change, and developing and implementing evaluation designs.

Providers and commissioners should start with specifying the evidence they want to gather and why, rather than being guided by the recommendation of a particular tool. After formulating specific ideas about the kinds of evidence desired, and consulting the theory of change described below, selecting and applying relevant tools should be straightforward.

Even though Framework 2.0 is called an outcomes framework, we believe that it is necessary for youth organisations to focus equally on the left-hand side of the evaluation model, and for their funders and commissioners to support this. ***The left-hand side of this model focuses on context and setting: the relationships that practitioners develop with each other and with young people; the needs, interests and experiences that young people bring; and the engagement of those practitioners and young people in provision.*** Many features of context and setting are within the ‘sphere of control’ of youth organisations and their staff.

Youth Outcomes Framework 2.0

There are many ways to talk about social and emotional learning outcomes for young people. In refining the model at the heart of the original Catalyst Framework (1.0), we wanted to make it more concise, align it better with the latest research and clarify the terminology it uses. Most importantly, a revised Framework 2.0 needs to focus on (a) the social and emotional skills that matter most for young people *and* (b) how young people are supported and motivated to master those skills.

Framework 1.0 focused on social and emotional “capabilities” defined as “the ability to function in important ways, to create valuable outcomes, and to navigate choices and challenges” (McNeil et al., 2012, p. 7). In Framework 2.0, we use the term *skill* as practically synonymous with *capability*. Rather than trying to distinguish among abilities, capabilities, capacities, competencies, and skills – all of which can be viewed as referring to the same set of psychological and behavioural processes – we focus on what appear to be a more fundamental set of distinctions relevant to understanding, promoting, and measuring SEL skills (e.g., mental vs. behavioural skills, optimal vs. functional skills, and automatic vs. intentional agency).

The Youth Outcomes Framework 2.0 consists of three elements: The first element is a set of *Outcome Domains* that describe key causal dynamics and performance indicators associated with subsets of interrelated SEL skills. The second element is a *Theory of Change* that describes the interrelations among SEL skills, their expression and modification within provision settings, their transfer beyond provision, and the program features and staff practices that support their growth. The third element is *Guidance for Applied Measurement* that describes how to use the outcome domains and theory of change to select designs and measures to address provision-specific practical and research questions, further the continuous improvement process, and produce clear accounts of the impact of youth services work on young people.

We hope many funding bodies and local authority commissioners will use Framework 2.0 to inform the way they make decisions about resourcing. We believe that organisations that embed meaningful approaches to evaluation and learning at the heart of their culture, and strive to gather a rich body of evidence of how their approach supports young people’s development, are

much better placed to enable young people to achieve positive change in their lives and the communities in which they live.

I. Outcome Domains

Although we use the term *outcome* according to the dictionary definition – that is, a consequence of something that happens as a result of something else – it is important to recognise that any given measure can be used as a predictor or outcome, depending on its placement within the overall program or study design. In other words, the term outcome should be understood not as “final outcomes per se but rather indicators of progress along a successful life path” (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p. 67). In these terms, outcomes include both the SEL skills themselves, however conceived, and the life course achievements they are associated with (e.g., health, education, and employment).

Background

Reviewing both US-based and international work on social and emotional learning highlights the importance of a wide range of psychological and behavioural skills, ranging from very specific psychological processes that occur on the order of milliseconds (e.g., updating working memory) to broad patterns of behaviour that occur over minutes, days, and months (e.g., teamwork and relationship skills). Attempts to organise this vast array of skills into a coherent theoretical or measurement framework has yielded dozens of unique but overlapping frameworks. For example, ***a recent review of SEL theory, research, and practice by the American Institutes for Research (Berg et al., 2017) found over 100 different SEL frameworks.*** Given the extent of diversity across such frameworks, Jones et al. (2019) developed resources to help stakeholders understand the unique strengths of different frameworks as well as the alignment between core elements of these different frameworks. The general conclusions from this work are (a) there is currently no single consensus framework that is obviously more scientifically or practically valid than any or all of the others, and (b) the use of the same terms by different frameworks where presumably referring to different things (i.e., jingle fallacies), and the use of different terms by different frameworks where presumably referring to the same things (i.e., jangle fallacies), are abiding challenges faced by stakeholders charged with making funding, evaluation, training, and measurement decisions.

In our efforts to develop Framework 2.0, we reviewed and reflected on a number of potentially viable SEL skill frameworks. For example, we found the youth development framework developed by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UCCSR) to be helpful as a review of the ways in which children and young people develop into adulthood (Nagaoka et al., 2015). Like many other SEL skill frameworks, the UCCSR framework does not focus on youth work or any particular provision for young people. Instead, it reviews information arising from a variety of different disciplines, including theories of learning, neuroscience and child development. Similarly, like many other SEL skill frameworks, insights afforded by the UCCSR framework are applicable across a variety of settings, including home, school, and informal/non-formal learning activities.

The UCCSR framework provided a summary of evidence about how different factors interact to support young people’s development, including their interaction with the world around them. ***The UCCSR framework suggests a way forward in refining the Catalyst Framework, including a continued focus on building youth’s SEL skills to increase their experiences of agency: SEL skills like self-regulation, empathy, and collaboration underpin young people’s development and have long-term positive effects in many different areas of young people’s lives.*** According to the

UCCSR framework, growing these skills often requires learning by doing, developing increasingly rich perspectives on oneself and others, having opportunities to test and refine an internal compass for decisions that are consistent with one's values and beliefs, making intentional choices about one's path in life.

Developmental experiences in youth program settings – and the staff practices and relationships that help to create them – provide opportunities to learn SEL skills by doing, and ***this experiential learning (i.e., SEL skill growth) provides a strong basis for transferring these skills to other settings. To complete the logic model, SEL skills that transfer, then support achievement of a broad set of outcomes across different settings and moments in the life course.***

Multilevel person-in-context models of youth development programs (e.g., Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al., 2016) facilitate thinking about how the SEL skills being developed within provision – that is, at the point of service (POS) – are both (a) embedded within the wider context of policy decisions, family background, and youth services quality and (b) related subsequently to shorter-term youth outcomes (e.g., SEL skill growth) and longer-term youth achievements (e.g., graduation and employment). Here, we use the *Multilevel Person-in-Context: Neuroperson (MPCn)* model (Peck & Smith, 2019) that focuses on the structure and dynamics of SEL skill growth (described below) and was developed to improve the precision and validity of performance data used in lower-stakes quality improvement systems (QIS) in the American out-of-school time (OST) sector (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016; Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2019).

Following the seminal work on the key personal and social assets characterising positive youth development that was generated by the US-based National Research Council's Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), along with a variety of similar efforts (e.g., Jones et al., 2017; Larson et al., 2006; Lerner et al., 2005), there is general consensus around the kinds of social and emotional skills that matter for young people. For example, the Framework 1.0 skill domains were built on the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework which has been developed over the past two decades (cf. Jones et al., 2017). The outcome domains described below are intended to both simplify and extend the common language for discussing and promoting SEL skill growth in a way that is easily understood by practitioners, commissioners and young people.

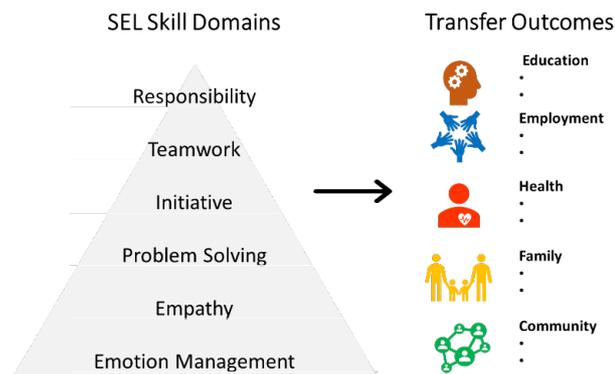
We organise Framework 2.0 by reference to six domains of youth SEL skills and corresponding staff practices. We selected these domains because:

- They were generated from evidence-based practitioner expertise and youth interviews about the experiences that build SEL skills and how skills transfer beyond the provision setting and into the early adult life course (Smith, McGovern, Peck, et al., 2016).⁴
- They have extensive overlap with many other frameworks that seek to describe SEL skills.
- They describe, in plain language, SEL mental and behavioural skills that are both developed during youth provision and transferred beyond provision.

⁴ The work of Reed Larson and colleagues provided the primary evidence base for developing the interview questions, SEL skill domains, and performance standards. Domain content was derived primarily from the voices of practitioners and adolescents, via hundreds of interviews conducted across two decades. A list of published work related to the six SEL skill domains can be found in Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016, Appendix C; a complete list of Larson's work in this area can be found at <http://youthdev.illinois.edu/>.

Figure 2 describes six SEL skill domains that reflect sets of interrelated staff practices and youth experiences within provision, as well as SEL skills that youth bring to provision and transfer to other domains of life, such as family, school, and early adulthood. Ideally, youth provision, which entails setting-specific staff practices and youth experiences at the POS, is designed to achieve specific SEL benchmarks (i.e., types and levels of performance) in one or more skill domains. Achieving proximal benchmarks (e.g., young people’s engagement at the POS) promotes both skill growth during provision and skill transfer beyond provision.

Figure 2. Youth Provision: SEL Skill Domains and Transfer Outcomes.



Specification

According to the Theory of Change (described below), the content of each domain includes (a) the quality of staff practices at the POS, (b) young people’s demonstration of mental and behavioural skills at the POS, and (c) the mental and behavioural skills young people bring to, develop in, and transfer from provision. Table 1 provides plain language descriptions of young people’s mental and behavioural skills for each of the six domains.

Table 1. Young People’s Mental and Behavioural Skills for Each of the Six Domains.

Domain	
Emotion Management	<p>Youth SEL Skills: Abilities to be aware of, name, understand, and constructively handle both positive and negative emotions.</p> <p>Mental Skill Indicators: Focusing and shifting awareness; reappraisal; response inhibition.</p> <p>Behavioural Skill Indicators: Easily frustrated; remains calm in stressful situations.</p> <p>Optimal Skill Benchmarks: 4.0 on the ARYB – Emotion Management (EM) scale.</p> <p>Functional Skill Benchmarks: Positive T1-T2 individual-level functional SEL skill profile change & positive mean-level change on EM belief scale.</p>
Empathy	<p>Youth SEL Skills: Relating to others with empathy, compassion, acceptance and understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences</p> <p>Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to understand how others feel, feel what others are feeling, and feel bad for others who are worse off or get their feelings hurt.</p>

	<p>Behavioural Skill Indicators: Noticing when others are emotionally upset, showing empathy by reflecting others' feelings, responding to others' feelings without taking them personally.</p> <p>Optimal Skill Benchmarks: 4.0 on the ARYB – Empathy (EY) scale.</p> <p>Functional Skill Benchmarks: Positive T1-T2 individual-level functional SEL skill profile change & positive mean-level change on EY belief scale.</p>
Problem Solving	<p>Youth SEL Skills: Abilities to plan, strategise and implement complex tasks, including critical thinking, goal setting and responsible decision making.</p> <p>Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to brainstorm and organise ideas, make alternative plans, make step-by-step plans, manage time, and keep track of goal progress.</p> <p>Behavioural Skill Indicators: Brainstorm ideas before developing a plan, evaluate alternative plans for reaching a specific goal, create plans with multiple steps, manage time, keep track of goal progress, and adjust to feedback .</p> <p>Optimal Skill Benchmarks: 4.0 on the ARYB – Problem Solving (PS) scale.</p> <p>Functional Skill Benchmarks: Positive T1-T2 individual-level functional SEL skill profile change & positive mean-level change on PS belief scale.</p>
Initiative	<p>Youth SEL Skills: Abilities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified role.</p> <p>Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to take the initiative, generate new solutions, persist during challenge, and risk failure.</p> <p>Behavioural Skill Indicators: Take the initiative, set ambitious but realistic goals, stay on-task despite distractions, and push through during a challenging task.</p> <p>Optimal Skill Benchmarks: 4.0 on the ARYB – Initiative (IN) scale.</p> <p>Functional Skill Benchmarks: Positive T1-T2 individual-level functional SEL skill profile change & positive mean-level change on IN belief scale.</p>
Teamwork	<p>Youth SEL Skills: Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others, including communication, teamwork and leadership.</p> <p>Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to do fair share of group work, help others, seek help from others, respect others' viewpoints, and hold others accountable.</p> <p>Behavioural Skill Indicators: Help or cooperate with others who are struggling, seek help from others, remind others to do their part, and keep track of own and others' group progress.</p> <p>Optimal Skill Benchmarks: 4.0 on the ARYB – Teamwork (TM) scale.</p> <p>Functional Skill Benchmarks: Positive T1-T2 individual-level functional SEL skill profile change & positive mean-level change on TM belief scale.</p>
Responsibility	<p>Youth SEL Skills: Abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfil obligations of challenging roles.</p> <p>Mental Skill Indicators: Abilities to take responsibility for their actions, finish tasks that are started, be counted on to get their part done, do the things that</p>

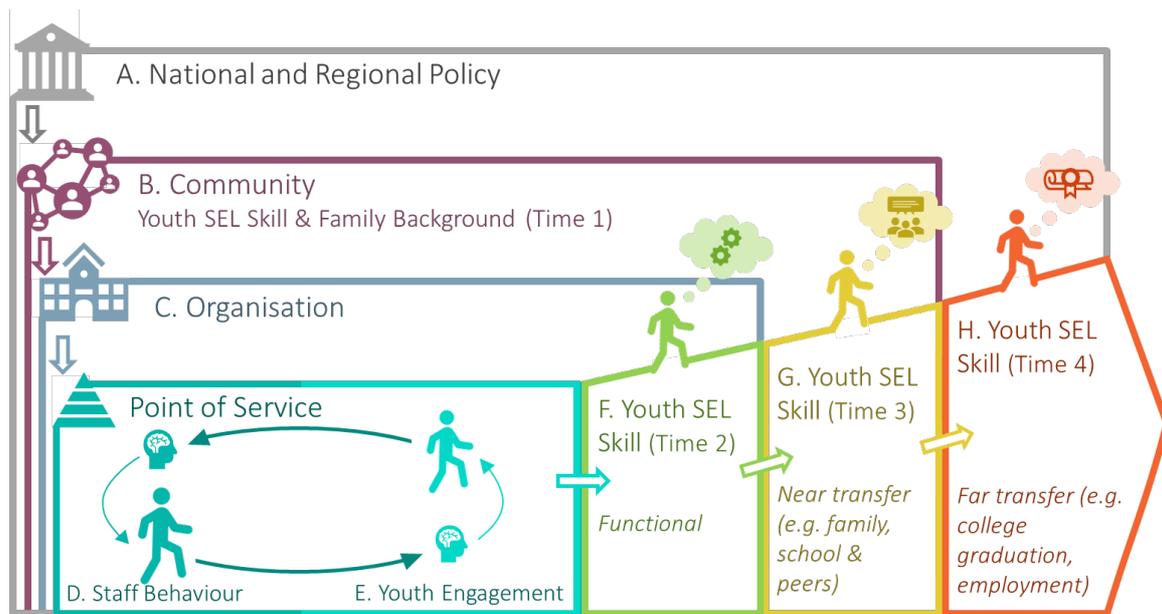
	<p>they say they are going to do, and do their best when an adult asks them to do something.</p> <p>Behavioural Skill Indicators: Finish the task that they started, do the things that they said they are going to do, acknowledge mistakes and take action to address them, and do the things an adult asked them to do.</p> <p>Optimal Skill Benchmarks: 4.0 on the ARYB – Responsibility (RS) scale.</p> <p>Functional Skill Benchmarks: Positive T1-T2 individual-level functional SEL skill profile change & positive mean-level change on RS belief scale.</p>
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II. Theory of Change

Taken together, the various parts of the MPC_n model (Peck & Smith, 2019) can be arranged into a generic *theory of change* (ToC), applicable to most youth development provision settings (see Figure 3). The ToC provides (a) an overview of how the various parts and processes associated provision and SEL growth go together and (b) guidance about the kinds of measures necessary to address specific questions about both provision quality and young people’s SEL skill growth. This ToC maps fairly closely onto, and extends, the Youth Investment Fund’s ToC – expressed in terms of Activities, Mechanisms, Outcomes, and Impacts (Hill, Scanlon, & Anderton, 2019). In particular, the Framework 2.0 ToC provides more detail about (a) the geographical nesting of provision-specific points of service within organisations, communities, and regions, along with their corresponding policy mandates, and (b) the diverse manifestations of young people’s SEL skills both before they enter provision (e.g., pre-existing skill levels and family background) and after they leave provision (e.g., skill transfer to both contemporaneous family, school, and peer settings and longer-term life course achievements, such as early adulthood health, education, and employment).

The idea that young people’s engagement and learning is nested within multiple setting levels informed the development and testing of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI; Smith et al., 2012), in which policy mandates originating at the national, regional, or community levels influence young people’s SEL skill growth mainly by cascading through intermediate setting levels (i.e., organisations and provision sessions, or the POS). This multilevel continuous improvement cascade process highlights the extent to which YPQI effects depend on providers enacting different roles at different setting levels (e.g., staff and managers plan with data during team meetings at the organisation level and then staff enact intended improvement practices at the POS level). From this multilevel cascade perspective, young people’s engagement and learning depend critically on managers and staff creating and implementing high-quality curricula at the organisation level and, then, staff implementing high-quality instructional practices at the POS level.

Figure 3: Theory of Change for OST Contexts and Youth Development



The ToC shown in Figure 3 shows the main pathways for youth development and learning in OST settings, including the eventual transfer of skills from the OST context to other contexts (e.g., family, school, and peers). This ToC is intended to support providers' thinking about quality improvement systems, staff practices at the POS, and youth SEL skill growth in ways that (a) support intentionality in program planning and delivery and (b) make more efficient use of resources committed to measurement, evaluation and continuous improvement. This ToC is also designed to help providers think clearly about the outcomes they are trying to achieve (e.g., engagement at the POS versus SEL skill growth) and empower providers to focus on, review, and discuss the details of item content, rather than the more abstract domain and scale names.

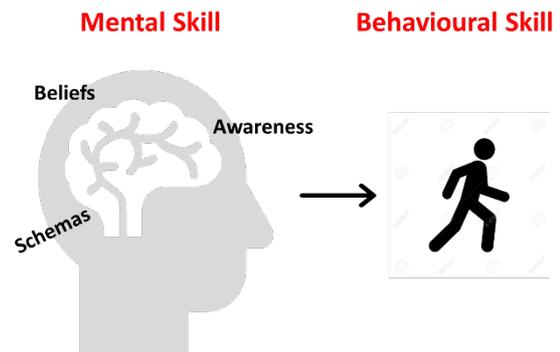
According to the ToC, high-quality staff practices and content delivered at the POS, where staff and young people meet during provision sessions, will produce heightened levels of youth engagement during each session of provision. Over time and multiple provision sessions, the combination of high-quality staff practices and young people's engagement at the POS promotes the growth of SEL skills. With sufficient attendance at, and intensity of exposure to, high-quality settings, the effects of SEL skill growth will transfer to other settings, including school-day classrooms.

The Neuroperson Model of SEL Skills

The neuroperson model (see Figure 4) is a simplification of the more detailed Basic Levels of Self (BLoS) model (Roeser, Peck, & Nasir, 2006; Roeser & Peck, 2009) and focuses on three qualitatively different kinds of mental skills involved with youth becoming more behaviourally-skilled (e.g., at self-regulation and social interactions). **The neuroperson model advances Framework 1.0 by, for example, highlighting the role of prior learning, clarifying two different forms of youth agency, and focusing especially on skills that enable young people to intentionally author their own development.**

The neuroperson model is based on the existence of, and interrelations among, three distinct regions of the brain involved with SEL skill representation and functioning⁵ which, for simplicity, we refer to using the terms: Schemas, Beliefs, and Awareness. Similar to dual-systems approaches to psychological functioning (e.g., Deutsch & Strack, 2006; Hofmann et al., 2009; Kahneman & Frederick, 2007), these terms denote different operating systems typical of all developing humans and have been identified in multiple clinical and experimental literatures (Berntson & Cacioppo, 2003; Bowlby, 1988; Derryberry & Tucker, 1991; Epstein, 2003; Lewis & Todd, 1997; MacLean, 1990; Roeser & Peck, 2009).

Figure 4. The Neuroperson Model



Schemas

The term *schemas*, as used here, refers to non-verbal, non-symbolic, affectively-charged representations of the self and world, as in attachment schemas (Bowlby, 1988). Schemas are initially formed and elaborated automatically during child-caregiver interactions and have been described in terms of four primary forms of *attachment style* (i.e., secure, insecure [anxious, or avoidant], and disorganised). As relatively-enduring parts of the identity system, such attachment schemas act like *set points* for the way young people initially engage in and respond to provision. Including schemas as a core feature of the framework is intended to help practitioners address both basic human needs (e.g., competency, autonomy, and relatedness) and the background experiences of young people. For example, many young people enter provision having had a wide range of adverse childhood experiences (Carlson et al., 2019; Merrick et al., 2018), and ‘meeting youth where they are at’ means being sensitive to their feelings and understanding that they may be emotionally triggered in ways that make it difficult or impossible for them to be mentally present and engaged in the provision.

Beliefs

The term *beliefs*, as used here, refers to verbal-symbolic representations of the self and world. Basic beliefs differentiate and integrate across time to form complex belief systems, such as attitudes that combine to form goals that combine to form plans. During childhood, and beyond, beliefs are formed automatically during social interactions but, also, intentionally during self-reflection (particularly, during and after adolescence). Just as attitudes, goals, and plans can be viewed as increasingly complex belief systems, there are many other psychological constructs that can be defined in terms of belief systems (e.g., values, opinions, mindsets, self-concepts, social identities). Most of the terms used by typical outcomes frameworks can be defined in terms of beliefs about the self and world. For example, both perspective-taking (e.g., the ability to distinguish another person’s perspective from one’s own perspective) and theory of mind (e.g., the

⁵ The neuroperson model uses the terms schemas, beliefs, and awareness to denote three qualitatively different internal representation systems (and associated functions) *centred* within, respectively, the limbic system, the neocortex, and the prefrontal cortex. The BLoS model uses similar but additional terms mapped onto to a more nuanced description of brain systems (Peck & Smith, 2019; Roeser et al., 2006; Roeser & Peck, 2009).

ability to understand that other people have their own intentions and feelings) can be defined in terms of *beliefs about others' goals, intentions, and feelings*.

In contrast to schemas, which are relatively stable and change mainly as a result of many direct and repeated social interactions, beliefs are relatively malleable and can be modified as a result of single indirect social interactions (e.g., vicarious learning, or learning by observing something that happens to someone else) or even simply by reflecting on previous or anticipated social interactions. Nevertheless, once formed, both schemas and beliefs tend to be relatively enduring, exist and function outside of conscious awareness, and influence *conscious* feelings and behaviour only after being *activated* (e.g., by an environmental trigger or self-reflection). Including beliefs as a core feature of the framework is intended to help practitioners address things like specific content knowledge (e.g., what young people need to know about their task, situation, and culture) and more general personal and social identity issues (e.g., values, efficacy, and roles).

Awareness

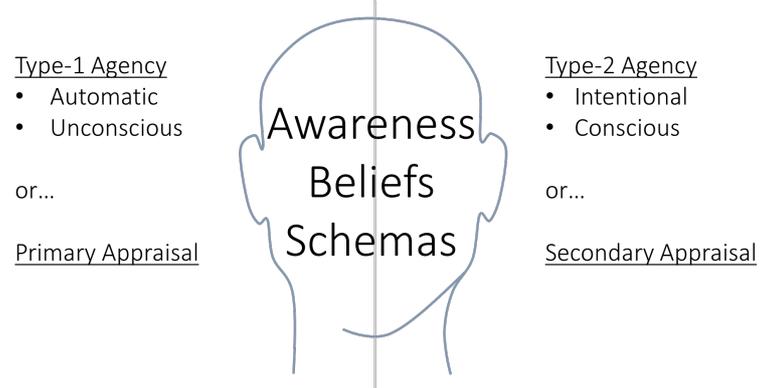
The term *awareness* (or *executive attention*), as used here, refers specifically to consciously controlling the focus of awareness in relation to ongoing thoughts and feelings. The awareness part of the neuroperson model also stands for the entire set of *currently-activated* beliefs and schemas (i.e., phenomenologically immediate thoughts and feelings) and the *executive functions* (e.g., shifting and focusing awareness) that operate on those thoughts and feelings to provide the basis for all forms of self-reflection (e.g., secondary appraisal, planning, and the effortful control of impulses). In this view, executive functions are the primary skills that allow individuals to actively participate in the otherwise automatic relations between what James (1890) referred to as *I* (i.e., awareness) and *Me* (e.g., thoughts and feelings). Including awareness as a core feature of the framework is intended to help practitioners address the most developmentally-advanced forms of autonomy, agency, and self-regulation; in particular, to help youth use awareness to reflect, evaluate, plan, problem solve, inhibit and redirect dominant responses, and otherwise participate consciously in their own personal and social identity development.

Agency

The BLoS model refers to two different but interrelated forms of agency: automatic and intentional (see Figure 5). All young people exhibit *automatic agency* (Type 1), as in primary appraisals derived from prior experience and nonconscious knowledge of themselves and the world around them. The integrated

system of schemas and beliefs that young people bring to provision provide a set point for their basic regulation skills (e.g., how likely they are to be interested in or triggered by provision content). In contrast, *intentional agency* (Type 2) involves the more subtle and sporadic process of consciously shifting and focusing awareness among immediate thoughts and feelings, as in self-reflection and secondary appraisal. Consciously focusing on thinking, feeling, and acting to optimise learning experiences occurs best when young people (a) have had their basic regulation needs met (e.g., they have not been triggered emotionally and task content has been scaffolded to

Figure 5. Type 1 and Type 2 Agency.

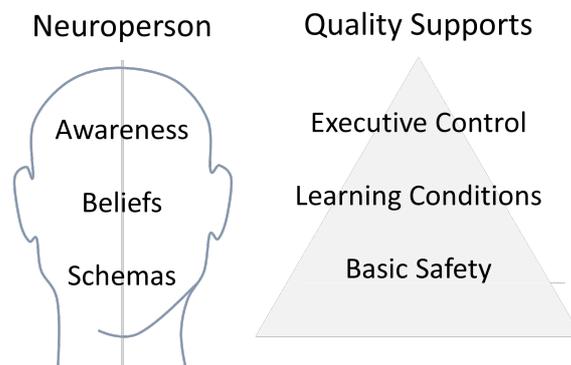


a moderate difficulty level) and (b) are being actively supported by staff to consciously reflect on information, experiences, meaning, and implications as they emerge during POS engagement.

Focusing on schemas, beliefs, awareness, and agency – in contrast to terms like cognition, emotion, and motivation (which tend to be ambiguous, hence create jingle and jangle fallacies) – draws attention to, and helps demystify, some of the key challenges faced by stakeholders and practitioners, such as: (a) how to understand and respond to young people who have had adverse life experiences and whose corresponding attachment schemas are triggered while participating in youth services (creating basic self-regulation issues), (b) how to understand the bulk of terms used in the many SEL frameworks as different words (e.g., knowledge, mindsets, values) for the same things (i.e., beliefs about the self and world), and (c) how to understand the critical role that conscious awareness plays in promoting the highest forms of human agency (e.g., allowing youth to become intentional authors of their own identity and development). **Harmonisation of these BLoS systems in pursuit of life goals (e.g., developing an integrated identity, graduating from school, and keeping a good job) can be viewed as the main point of focusing on SEL skill growth.**

In addition, placing the BLoS model, or its neuroperson simplification, at the centre of the person-in-context system facilitates detailed understanding of the sequential and reciprocal relations among staff practices, youth experiences, youth SEL skills, and youth behaviour (e.g., adult-youth interactions). For example, young people’s beliefs and schemas are activated, consciously or unconsciously, by their engagement with context. Settings that effectively activate young people’s secure attachment schemas and personal goals are much more likely to promote engagement with task content and learning (see Figure 6). Because young people arrive at provision with very different prior experiences and ways of seeing the world, effectively engaging young people’s learning and agency depends on practitioners building and maintaining relationships with young people and their communities, which means getting to know young people deeply – a best practice in trauma-informed approaches.

Figure 6. SEL Skills and Supportive Quality Practices



Being sensitive to young people’s attachment schemas is particularly important where serving young people who have experienced chronic stress or trauma, which means that they are likely to respond unintentionally to triggers or challenge arising in provision. Staff may need guidance on how best to respond to such emotional episodes (e.g., how to be supportive but not intrusive), but the main goal is to be responsive rather than dismissive. Young people are empowered when they are supported in consciously acknowledging their thoughts and feelings about what is happening in and around them and what it means for their ability to function constructively within provision. **Social and emotional learning, then, is a process of self-organisation and self-regulation that promotes young people’s experience of agency, or the experience of control, efficacy, and esteem that follow from being supported and trusted to make decisions about things that affect them** (Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al., 2016).

III. Guidelines for Measurement

Benefits of an Integrated Model

Integrated Models, as described by Grice (2015), focus on the tangible parts and processes, or causes and effects, governing mental and behavioural skills in specific settings or contexts; as such, they can be used to represent and distinguish among (a) mental skills that frame or predicate meaning-making, (b) behavioural episodes that express meaning, and (c) situational features that support or undermine particular meanings or behaviour. Integrated models for specific research or evaluation questions are relatively easy to develop where using these distinctions. For OST settings and systems focused on young people's SEL skill growth, the key parts and processes are outlined in the ToC shown in Figure 3. Prior to selecting measures, we recommend that local practitioners use this ToC to guide the creation of integrated models that reflect each of the specific research or practical questions they want to address. As discussed below, with these integrated models in hand, the type and range of viable measures relevant for testing the selected models should become more apparent than would otherwise be the case (e.g., where using only variable-centred models).

In addition to detailing the mental and behavioural components of an integrated model, the BLoS model implies some general guidelines for selecting measures based on sensitivity to change in the target of measurement. For example, the schema, belief, and awareness systems can be ordered along a *stability hierarchy* reflecting the expected malleability of their constituent elements: Schemas are relatively-enduring, on the order of years, so a time 2 schema assessment (e.g., attachment, social phobia) sensitive to change would likely be on the order of months, years, and decades. Beliefs are relatively enduring, on the order of minutes to months, so a time 2 belief assessment sensitive to change could be on the order of minutes, months, or years. Awareness, per se, is relatively-fleeting, on the order of milliseconds to seconds, so a time 2 awareness assessment sensitive to change would be on the order of milliseconds to minutes. However, the awareness system conceived as a proxy for phenomenological experience (e.g., currently activated beliefs and schemas) can also be viewed as reflecting the underlying neurobiological systems that support awareness and phenomenological representation (e.g., arousal and working memory), and these systems have base-rate stabilities that more closely resemble schemas than awareness. In other words, measurement demands vary widely across specific aspects of the awareness system, so providers should take care that the measures selected map closely onto the specific skills they intend to measure and promote.

Mental and Behavioural Skills

The BLoS model also highlights the necessity of distinguishing between mental skills and behavioural skills. From this perspective, young people's behaviour is an external manifestation of mental skills developed through mental and behavioural engagement with the context (which includes both task demands and social relationships). Behaviour is an important indicator of the status of basic and advanced mental regulation skills, but provides only loosely coupled information about those skills due to the principles of equifinality (e.g., similar behaviours can be produced by different psychological processes) and multifinality (e.g., different behaviours can be produced by the similar psychological processes) (Bertalanffy, 1968; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996). Consequently, comprehensive assessments of young people's SEL skills require measures of both mental and behavioural skills.

Optimal and Functional Skill Measures

In addition to distinguishing between mental and behavioural skills, the BLoS model also distinguishes between youth outcomes conceived as *states* of optimal engagement at the POS (e.g., demonstrating SEL skills with the aid of high-quality support) versus youth outcomes conceived as relatively-enduring functional SEL skill *traits* that are transferred into and out of provision. The distinction between states and traits, as used here, reflects the distinction between optimal and functional skill levels (Fischer, Rose, & Rose, 2006); that is, optimal skill is the best someone can do while receiving the highest-quality supports, and functional skill is the best they can do with few supports. In these terms, measures of young people’s behavioural engagement at the POS, where they are relatively-well supported, reflect optimal skill levels, whereas measures of SEL skills in general (e.g., typical self-report measures) reflect functional skill levels, or how young people think they perform in general, where high-quality supports cannot be assumed.

As shown in Figure 7, ***we recommend adult ratings of young people’s SEL behavioural skills at the POS because they are more likely to reflect optimal skill levels*** than young people’s self-reports about their skills in general, which should be more likely to reflect functional skill levels. In addition, the former are likely to be more sensitive to variations in context quality than the latter because optimal behavioural skills are more proximal to provision supports than the relatively-distal functional skills typically assessed using self-report tools focused on skills in general.

Figure 7. Recommended Measures by Type and Purpose

	Mental	Behavioural
Optimal	Requires a performance task	Recommended for feasibility and sensitivity to program effects on SEL skill
Functional	Youth Survey	Requires a rating from home, school, etc.

Linking POS Engagement, SEL Skill Growth, and Transfer Outcomes

Evaluating the relations between POS engagement, SEL skill growth, and SEL skill transfer should be the most informative where measures are aligned, to the extent feasible, by reference to one of the six SEL skill domains (see Table 1). For example, where examining the relations of mental engagement at the POS to SEL skill growth, the SEL skill measures should be relatively domain-specific and aligned with staffs’ intentions and practices. However, where examining the relations of SEL skill growth to far-transfer outcomes (see Figure 2), the domain-specificity requirement is less applicable because life course achievements such as employment and health appear to depend more on integrated SEL skill sets than any particular SEL skill alone. A lack of well-developed SEL skills in any of the six domains would likely have similarly deleterious effects on achieving a good education, a good job, the best possible physical and mental health, as well as well-functioning family, peer, and community networks.

Selecting Measures

We encourage providers to think carefully about the specific mental and behavioural skills they intend to work on during provision and then select tools that are (a) designed explicitly to assess those skills, (b) produce data of known reliability and validity, and (c) have been shown empirically to be sensitive to changes predicted to occur within the span of time during which they are able to collect pre-test and post-test data. The selected measures must also be (d) *feasible* to administer,

meaning both providers and young people must have the time, motivation, and infrastructure necessary to complete the measures. For example, despite having selected measures with evidence of reliability and validity, it may not be feasible to use an on-line version of those measures if they require an hour to complete, if providers have access to only a few or no computers, and if no time within provision has been budgeted for young people to sit sequentially through the data collection process.

The ToC (see Figure 3) can be used to identify the kinds of measures necessary for addressing a wide range of research and evaluation⁶ questions. In general, the further left you go in the ToC, the more that specific measurement details matter. For example, having detailed information about the specific SEL strengths and weaknesses young people bring to provision helps front-line staff calibrate and target their interactions with each particular young person. As a basic principle of scaffolding, such background details are analogous to a math teacher knowing whether each student has mastered addition before moving on to subtraction. Here, we focus on the elements of the ToC most relevant to youth SEL skill growth, labelled with the letters B, E, and F.

Needs Assessment and Baseline SEL Skills

For both impact and continuous quality improvement (CQI) questions, the ToC suggests starting with pre-provision, or baseline, measures of young people's SEL skills that are relevant to SEL skill growth and functioning within provision, or element B of the ToC: young people nested within their local communities (e.g., family, neighbourhood, school, peers). In this case, measures of young people's SEL skills are conceived as *individual-level* measures of the mental and behavioural skills that are likely to be displayed in community settings, prior to participation in provision. Pre-provision measures can include both more general *needs assessments* and more specific *pre-tests* of the SEL skills that will be assessed subsequently to estimate the growth of young people's functional and optimal mental and behavioural skills.

Baseline needs assessments can include information about young people's (a) family and community situations, (b) histories of education and enrichment experiences, and (c) exposure to stressful life events (e.g., adverse childhood experiences). In particular, consistent with the neuropsychological model, baseline needs assessments could also include measures of young people's attachment schemas or related constructs, such as fear of abandonment, social phobia, or rejection sensitivity. Schemas and beliefs operate as integrated systems, so achieving a holistic understanding of young people's SEL skill status prior to entering provision requires measures of both schemas and beliefs.

Pre-test assessments of functional mental and behavioural skills generally take the form of self-report measures associated with SEL-oriented youth outcome frameworks (e.g., self-esteem, emotional wellbeing, relationships). There are literally hundreds of possible measures from which to choose. Although many of these measures focus on mental skills, self-report measures often also include items about young people's functional behavioural skills.

For youth provision settings, we recommend pre-test information about young people's optimal behavioural skills, which we view as generally more valid and sensitive measures of SEL skills

⁶ By "research and evaluation" questions, we are referring to questions about both (a) provision impact on young people's point-of-service engagement and SEL skill growth and (b) the use of provision data (e.g., staff instructional quality, young people's POS engagement, and young people's SEL skills) in continuous quality improvement processes (e.g., planning with data and training decisions) (cf. Smith et al., 2019).

than young people's self-reports of their mental skills. In typical situations, assessing optimal behavioural skill levels should be done by providers after a few weeks in provision (as element E of the ToC). We recommend that provision staff collect pre-test data about young people's optimal behavioural skills during the provision or intervention to ensure that they are becoming sufficiently familiar with each young person's behaviour and so that they will know how to work with, and respond to, that and subsequent data about young people's behavioural skills.

Whichever measures are selected for the pre-provision assessment should generally be (a) relevant to a specific practical or research question, (b) aligned with program plans and staff intentions to promote the kinds of skill growth the measures are intended to assess, and (c) used again at the first post-provision assessment (i.e., element F of the ToC). In cases where it may be necessary or advantageous to obtain pre-test measures of young people's behavioural SEL skills *before they arrive at provision*, as part of element B of the ToC, there are several options: Use measures of optimal behavioural skills from prior years in provision; parent reports of young people's behaviour before entering provision; or young people's self-reports of their own baseline behaviour.

POS Engagement and Skill Growth

According to the ToC, high-quality staff practices at the POS that are scaffolded to a young person's skill levels promote both youth engagement at the POS and SEL skill growth during and following provision. Measures of young people's engagement at the POS correspond to element E of the ToC and take two primary forms: mental engagement and behavioural engagement. The term mental engagement, as used here, corresponds to the Awareness component of the neuroperson model (see Figure 4) and refers to the thoughts and feelings young people experience at the POS (e.g., interesting, challenging, stressful). According to the BLoS model, immediate thoughts and feelings are a function of the interaction between social supports and mental skills; that is, mental engagement is influenced by mental skills, but such thoughts and feelings should not be confused with mental skills themselves.

In addition to the influence of mental skills on mental engagement, **mental engagement is conceived as a primary driver of mental skill growth. In short, young people who are mentally engaged at the POS are expected to undergo more mental skill growth than young people who are disengaged.** For example, according to the ToC, the amount of growth in SEL skills that is expected to occur between pre- and post-provision assessments of SEL skills will differ by the extent of mental engagement at the POS for that young person. Assessments of young people's mental engagement at the POS can be obtained from youth self-report surveys about their thoughts and feelings that are administered either during or immediately following a provision. Care should be taken to ensure that the measures used for this purpose are designed to assess young people's phenomenological experience at the POS, as opposed to, for example, young people's beliefs about their own or others' mental skills. Assessments of optimal mental skills, whether occurring inside or outside of provision, generally require intensive measurement procedures that may be impractical for many providers.⁷

In addition to mental engagement, element E of the ToC also includes behavioural engagement at the POS. The term behavioural engagement, as used here, corresponds to the behavioural

⁷ Measurement procedures that yield detailed information about mental processes and skill growth, such as *direct assessments*, are becoming more widely available and viable for use within provisions (cf. McKown et al., 2013; 2019), but may nevertheless remain impractical in many settings.

component of the neuroperson model (see Figure 4). We generally describe behavioural engagement at the POS in terms of optimal behavioural skills. However, ***the behavioural skills young people display at the POS can vary along a continuum from functional to optimal, depending on the quality of supports provided by staff at the POS. For example, lower-quality staff practices at the POS are, by definition, more likely to promote the display of functional than optimal behavioural skills among participating young people.***

Assessments of young people's behavioural skill at the POS can be obtained from external ratings of young people's behaviour observed directly by providers during several hours and weeks of provision. The first such behavioural rating should occur only after providers have had the opportunity to become familiar with each of the individuals that they will be rating; that is, providers should have directly observed young people's behaviour at the POS for several hours and weeks before conducting their first set of behavioural ratings. Subsequently, and assuming methods for tracking the same young people over time have been implemented, evidence of young people's behavioural skill growth can be derived from behavioural ratings that are repeated after at least three months of provision. ***Provider ratings of young people's behavioural skill at the POS tend to be the most sensitive indicators of the effects of provision quality; hence, they are ideal for generating quality-to-outcomes impact estimates.*** Repeated ratings of young people's behavioural skill at the POS that are spaced less than three months across time should generally not be used for impact analyses because null findings may be confused with insufficient time for detectable skill growth to occur.

SEL skill assessments that occur after young people have participated in provision for several months can take several different forms. A first kind of post-provision assessment was described previously in terms of post-provision functional skill measures (i.e., element F of the ToC); these measures should generally be the same measures used for the pre-test assessment (i.e., element B of the ToC). A second kind of post-provision assessment was described in terms of in-provision behavioural skill rating measures (i.e., element E of the ToC); however, the follow-up, or repeated assessment, of behavioural skills can be viewed as post-provision to the extent that they are based on several hours and months of provider observation of young people at the POS. Two additional kinds of post-provision assessments are described next in terms of near- and far-transfer outcomes.

Transfer Outcomes

A third kind of post-provision assessment involves measures of SEL skills, and the consequences of SEL skills, as they occur in community contexts other than provision, such as family and school (i.e., element G of the ToC). We refer to this assessment period as involving the *near transfer* of SEL skills developed during provision to other community settings because the growth of SEL skills during provision should be evident in how those skills are transferred to tasks such as being a good family member, student, and friend. Accordingly, ***measures relevant to assessing the near transfer of SEL skills include academic grades and school discipline referrals obtained from school system records and parent (or guardian) reports of youth well-being and behaviour.*** If changes in near transfer effects are of prime interest to providers, they would be advised to include such measures as part any pre-testing (i.e., element B of the ToC) and plan on follow-up assessments scheduled not more frequently than biannually or annually.

A fourth kind of post-provision assessment involves measures of the *far transfer* of SEL skills to personal and social achievements occurring during early adulthood and in contexts that can (but do not necessarily have to) extend well beyond the local community into regional, national, or

international contexts (i.e., element H of the ToC). Measures of the far transfer of SEL skills developed within provision include high school, vocational training, and college graduations; obtaining, maintaining, and advancing employment; and developing a physically and mentally healthy lifestyle. These measures typically have no pre-test counterparts but can nevertheless be informative about the impact of high-quality youth services on young people's developmental pathways.

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Appendix 1: Standards for Social and Emotional Learning Practice and Practice Indicators in six Social and Emotional Learning domains⁸

Emotion Management - Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.

1. Young people's key experiences:
 - a. Young people experience a range of positive and negative emotions in a safe context.
 - b. Young people have opportunities to practice and develop healthy and functional emotion skills.
2. Staff practices
 - a. Staff create and adjust the structure of daily activities to accommodate young people's processing of emotion.
 - b. Staff model healthy emotion strategies within the context of caring, mutually-respectful relationships with young people.
 - c. Staff provide coaching to youth about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences.

Empathy - Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.

1. Young people's key experiences:
 - a. Young people explore social structure and power in relation to themselves and others.
 - b. Young people share their stories and listen to the stories of others.
 - c. Young people practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding.
2. Staff practices
 - a. Staff provide activities with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.
 - b. Staff model empathy skills with young people.

Teamwork - Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.

1. Young people's key experiences:
 - a. Young people develop group cohesion and trust.
 - b. Young people participate in successful collaboration.
 - c. Young people manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships.
2. Staff practices
 - a. Staff provide activities with norms and structure.
 - b. Staff model teamwork skills with young people.
 - c. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration.

⁸ Adapted from Smith, McGovern, Larson, et al. (2016).

Responsibility - Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.

1. Young people's key experiences:
 - a. Young people take on roles and obligations within activities.
 - b. Young people encounter difficult demands.
 - c. Young people draw on resources to fulfil challenging roles and internalise accomplishment.
2. Staff Practices
 - a. Staff provide structured but open-ended roles for young people.
 - b. Staff model and fulfil their own roles.
 - c. Staff promote high expectations, respect young people ownership of their roles, and provide help only as needed.

Initiative - Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.

1. Young people's key experiences:
 - a. Young people set ambitious and realistic goals.
 - b. Young people develop and sustain motivation by doing activities that matter to them.
 - c. Young people have experiences persevering through the ups and downs of difficult activities or challenges.
2. Staff practices
 - a. Staff provide ongoing assistance to help young people develop motivation within the activities.
 - b. Staff encourage youth to persist through challenging activities, making sure that the effort behind young people's achievement is recognised.

Problem-Solving - Abilities to plan, strategise, and implement complex tasks.

1. Young people's key experiences:
 - a. Young people engage in projects that involve organising actions over time.
 - b. Young people learn through cycles of strategic planning, execution, responding to emergent problems, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes.
 - c. Young people reflect on how outcomes of their activities provide information that helps build and verify their skills.
2. Staff practices
 - a. Staff provide sufficient structure to youth-driven projects.
 - b. Staff create opportunities for young people to observe models of successful activity or challenge.
 - c. Staff provide assistance, as needed, to help young people learn and solve problems on their own.
 - d. Staff offer young people opportunities for reflection on outcomes.