

Achieving Standards in the English Language Arts (and More) Using The RULER Approach to Social and Emotional Learning

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This article introduces The RULER Approach (“RULER”) to social and emotional learning, with a particular focus on its Feeling Words Curriculum. Through this curriculum, RULER contributes to the ultimate goals of an English language arts education—preparing students to achieve personal, social, and academic goals and to be engaged and contributing citizens. RULER complements the English language arts curriculum and draws on national learning standards to develop language skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and visually representing information. This article describes how RULER simultaneously reinforces student learning in the English language arts and develops 5 critical emotion skills—recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion.

Cognitive skills are very important, but they are so intertwined with the physical, social, and emotional systems that it is short-sighted, if not futile, to dwell on the intellect and exclude its partners. (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006, p. 22)

Promoting students’ social and emotional skills plays a critical role in improving their academic performance. (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005)

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Many educators are supporters of the beliefs put forth in the quotes opening this article. Only when students' social and emotional needs are met in conjunction with their traditional academic needs will schools support the development of the whole child (e.g., Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2008). Over the past few decades, social and emotional learning (SEL) programs have emerged to help schools meet these needs. SEL involves the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills related to self- and social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship management (Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). Schools that integrate SEL into their curricula better prepare students for success in school and in life than schools that do not (Weissberg, 2007).

Several states, including Illinois and New York, have passed legislation for schools to incorporate social and emotional standards into educational guidelines ("Illinois Children's Mental Health Act," 2003; "New York Children's Mental Health Act," 2006; see also www.CASEL.org). These policies are driven not only by the need to offer early interventions for all children but also by the accumulating empirical evidence of the impact of SEL programs on academic performance, mental and physical health, and life-long effectiveness (Payton et al., 2000; Weissberg, 2007; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). A meta-analysis of 213 studies examining the effects of SEL programming showed that students participating in SEL lessons scored significantly higher on standardized tests than students in comparison groups (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, in press). Students receiving SEL lessons also had greater improvements in social and emotional skills and fewer conduct problems and experiences of emotional distress.

In an era of increasing accountability and ever-increasing demands on administrators, teachers, and students, it is essential that SEL programs both contribute to the achievement of learning standards and infuse directly into existing curricula. The Feeling Words Curriculum, an essential component of The RULER Approach to SEL ("RULER"), integrates seamlessly into academic curricula and is designed to meet learning standards in the English language arts (Brackett, Maurer, et al., 2009; Maurer & Brackett, 2004). Becoming a proficient user of language is the foundation of the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum (and English language arts) and the primary focus of this article. Other critical components of RULER include leadership development for school leaders, professional development for educators, and workshops for families.

The content and lessons of the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum were developed to enhance the knowledge and skills that students need to achieve the standards of an English language arts education, such as those put forth by the International Reading Association and the National Council

of Teachers of English (IRA/NCTE, 1996b).¹ Guided by the curricular units and lessons, students systematically and consistently engage in structured learning opportunities in which they acquire and use a rich “feelings” vocabulary to understand and communicate information; read, write, analyze, and evaluate literature; communicate with others; and solve problems. One primary set of objectives of RULER, as with the English language arts, is for students to use language in their intellectual, social, and personal pursuits—to learn about the world, to communicate and have relationships with others, and to develop the self. In this article, we describe how the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum addresses students’ academic, social, and emotional needs.

LEARNING STANDARDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The English language arts incorporate knowledge and skills related to reading, writing, listening, speaking, as well as viewing and visually representing information. Standards for the English language arts establish what students should know about and be able to do with language in these areas (IRA/NCTE, 1996b). The achievement goals driving these standards are for all children to have the “opportunities and resources to develop the language skills they need to pursue life’s goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society” (p. 3). The 12 interrelated standards identified by IRA/NCTE do not dictate an established teaching approach or set of instructional tools (see p. 2). Rather, the standards outline (a) the *range of content* students should encounter when reading, writing, listening, speaking, and visually representing information (e.g., “content from many periods in many genres,” p. 3); (b) the *diversity of approaches* students should take when reading, writing, listening, speaking, and visually representing information (e.g., “draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts,” p. 3); and (c) the *variety of purposes* with which students should read, write, listen, speak, and visually represent information (e.g., cultivate an “understanding of the many dimensions of human experience of the cultures of the United States and the world of themselves,” p. 3). Summarized according to these three primary components in Table 1, the IRA/NCTE standards include an emphasis on the methods of and objectives for effective production and consumption of verbal, written, and visual language as well as on critical thinking, research and problem-solving skills, perspective taking, and self-fulfillment. In this article, we describe how the Feelings Words Curriculum can be used by teachers of the English language arts (and other subjects) to engage all students in learning and using language for academic, social, and personal achievement.

¹Learning standards for the English language arts vary at the level of individual states and localities. The architects of the national standards, IRA and NCTE, have worked closely with more than half of the states to develop standards at the state level (IRA/NCTE, 1996a).

TABLE 1 The Primary Components of the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (1996a) Standards for the English Language Arts

Content. *When reading, writing, speaking, listening, and visually representing, students should be exposed to a wide range of*

- Texts
 - Print (e.g., picture books, novels, short stories, poems, news articles, historical documents)
 - Non-print (e.g., speeches, puppet shows, plays, illustrations, maps, films, multimedia, graphic displays)
 - Fiction and nonfiction
 - Classic and contemporary
 - Produced by “professionals” and by peers
- Ideas
 - Current
 - Worldly
 - Historical
 - Personal
- Information sources
 - Texts
 - People
 - Artifacts
 - Technology (e.g., databases, media, video, internet)

Approach. *Students should apply a diversity of approaches when reading, writing, speaking, listening, and visually representing, including*

- Drawing from existing and emerging knowledge
 - Examples
 - Prior experience
 - Interactions with others (e.g., discussion of texts, alternative perspectives and interpretations)
 - Purpose (i.e., reason or motivation for working with a text, communicating information and ideas)
 - Knowledge of language (i.e., spelling, word meaning, punctuation, grammar, literal and figurative language)
 - Knowledge of other texts
 - Word identification strategies (e.g., context clues)
 - Awareness of literary devices (e.g., sentence structure, graphics, flashbacks, linear/nonlinear storylines)
 - First language (if not English)
 - Adapting use of language depending on audience (e.g., street vernacular vs. proper English)
 - Generating ideas and questions
 - Identifying and putting forth problems
 - Gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information collected across a range of sources (verbal, visual, oral, etc.)

Purpose. *Students should read, write, speak, listen, and visually represent for a variety of purposes, including*

- Comprehending, interpreting, evaluating, and appreciating texts
 - Creating, critiquing, and discussing texts
 - Being “knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical” users, interpreters, and producers of language
 - Communicating effectively ideas, information, and research findings to different audiences
 - Developing self-awareness and cultural awareness
 - Acquiring new information, carrying out research
 - Responding to the needs and demands of society and the workplace
 - Growing as a person (“self-discovery”)
 - Achieving personal goals (e.g., learning, enjoyment, communicating and exchanging information, persuasion)
 - Gathering and synthesizing information
 - Creating and communicating knowledge
 - Contributing to and participating in “a variety of literacy communities”
-

RULER FEELING WORDS CURRICULUM

To become proficient users of language, students must be provided with appropriate and ample opportunities to produce and consume language in the range of content areas, using the range of approaches, and meeting the objectives summarized in Table 1. These learning opportunities form the structure of the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum programs for students in the lower elementary (Brackett et al., 2010), upper elementary (Brackett, Maurer, et al., 2009), and middle school (Maurer & Brackett, 2004) grades. In the units and lessons that compose the Feeling Words Curriculum, students regularly and consistently write, read, speak, listen, and think using language for a variety of purposes (e.g., awareness, analysis, information gathering), with a variety of audiences (e.g., teacher, peers in the classroom and socially, self, family members), across a variety of topics (e.g., curriculum topics, current events, personal experiences), and in a variety of forms (e.g., written, spoken, nonverbal representations). These learning activities are designed at developmentally appropriate levels across our kindergarten to eighth-grade programs.

The Feeling Words Curriculum integrates seamlessly into standard classroom curricula at developmentally appropriate levels. It is rooted in the RULER model of emotional literacy, which advocates five key skills that are integral to effective learning and optimal development (Brackett, Rivers, Maurer, & Elbertson, in press). These skills are recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion. The RULER model states that teaching the knowledge associated with these emotion skills, emphasizing their importance across life domains, and providing opportunities to apply and practice using these skills fosters academic learning, quality relationships, and personal growth. The learning activities are centered on teaching students a rich “feelings” vocabulary that they can apply in school, with peers and family, and in their personal endeavors. The varied pedagogical tools used in the Feeling Words Curriculum reinforce and extend teaching and learning opportunities that are already ongoing across the curriculum in schools.

The Feeling Words Curriculum has been field-tested extensively in dozens of school districts and hundreds of schools (public and private) across the United States and abroad. Emotional literacy enriches the education of the whole child only when districts support and infuse the program across the educational environment (Brackett, Patti, et al., 2009; see also Devaney, O'Brien, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006). Thus, districts and schools that adopt the Feeling Words Curriculum receive comprehensive professional development opportunities that provide background in emotional literacy for school administrators, teachers, and families. Teachers also participate in interactive workshops to learn how to integrate the classroom program, and they are partnered with a certified program coach from whom they receive resources and support during the initial years of implementation.

Evaluations of the Feeling Words Curriculum have yielded promising indications of success. Feedback from students, teachers, parents, and administrators is overwhelmingly positive. Teachers using the program report that it is both easy to integrate and changing the culture of their classrooms (e.g., “[The RULER program is] creating a community of sharing and trust”; “New groups of students are being formed—students who otherwise would not have previously talked are now sharing with each other”). Our empirical evaluations of the program have shown that it is affecting children positively. For example, after seven months of being in a classroom using the program, fifth and sixth graders ($n = 140$) had better grades in reading, writing, and science compared to students ($n = 89$) in classrooms not using the programs. Students in classrooms using the Feeling Words Curriculum also were rated by teachers as having fewer attention and learning problems compared to students in classrooms not using the curriculum (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, in press). Another study of 1,140 students across four schools in England provided preliminary support that the Feeling Words Curriculum increased students’ emotional intelligence (Brackett, Rivers, Choe, & Adams, 2009).

The results of an ongoing, multiyear randomized controlled trial involving 62 schools in Brooklyn and Queens, New York, will provide definitive evidence for the impact of the Feeling Words Curriculum. Three months into the program, examination of the program’s impact on classroom social processes showed statistically significant results favoring RULER schools (those using the Feeling Words Curriculum) over comparison (non-RULER) schools (Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2010). Specifically, RULER schools scored significantly higher than non-RULER schools in positive climate (i.e., degree of warmth and connection observed in the classroom), teacher regard for student perspectives (i.e., degree to which the classroom is focused on students’ interests and motivations), instructional learning formats (i.e., teacher’s use of methods to maximize student engagement), concept development (i.e., teacher’s promotion of higher order thinking in the classroom), language modeling (i.e., extent to which teacher promotes students’ language skills), and overall emotional and instructional support. At the end of the school year, RULER schools continued to score higher than the non-RULER schools in positive climate, regard for student perspectives, and overall classroom emotional climate.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE FEELING WORDS CURRICULUM

Emotions can be (and often are) disruptive to learning, so why would educators choose to deliberately integrate emotions into their classrooms? Emotions serve many critical functions in the classroom, and educators can

leverage emotions in myriad ways to engage students in learning. Consider the following example:

Instead of launching into a lecture on the goings-on in ancient Rome, a teacher asks his students to think about a team they play on. When a student shares that she is on a soccer team, the teacher may ask the class to consider what it would be like to play on a team with four team captains. Some students identify benefits to having four different opinions contribute to devising strategies for winning against the opposing team, whereas other students argue that making decisions about the best strategy to use would be more difficult with the four different perspectives at play. Students engage actively in the classroom discussion, bringing up countless scenarios about the challenges associated with this type of leadership structure and how it would affect them as players on the team—*From which captain do you ask advice? How will the other captains feel if you don't ask for their opinions? What do you do if each captain has a different idea of what play you should make?* In the midst of the animated discussion, the teacher brings the students back to the history lesson that centers on the Roman oligarchy. He sets the context for issues facing the Roman people under a state governed by a few persons and asks students to write about the challenges of being ruled under this form of leadership structure.

Attempting to combat student boredom in the classroom, the originator of the Feeling Words Curriculum, Marvin Maurer, a new middle school teacher at the time, thought long and hard about the best way to get students interested in learning about ancient and modern civilizations. He knew intuitively that students needed to connect with what they were learning, and the best way he thought to create that connection was to get students to adopt the perspectives of others by stepping into their shoes and, more specifically, by feeling what they may have felt. Emotions are a universal vehicle to transport students into the lives, minds, and feelings of others. Moreover, the excitement generated by being able to participate actively in a class discussion can motivate even the most apathetic students. The classroom program Mr. Maurer developed over 30 years was ahead of its time—his colleagues did not “get” what he was trying to do (a “maverick teacher,” some remarked), but with the support of his department supervisor, Mr. Maurer changed the educational lives of his students.

The theory of emotional intelligence, which is foundational to the RULER model of emotional literacy, speaks to what Mr. Maurer was practicing—that emotions and thinking are inextricably linked. In the absence of emotion, thinking is stymied, and in the absence of thinking, emotions can run amok. Emotional intelligence theory proposes that the capacity to reason about and use emotion enhances thinking, problem solving, relationships, and personal growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Research shows that individuals who are more emotionally intelligent perform better in school

(Gil-Olarte Marquez, Palomera Martin, & Brackett, 2006; Mestra, Guil, Lopes, Salovey, & Gil-Olarte, 2006; Rivers, Brackett, & Salovey, 2008), have better quality relationships (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005; Lopes et al., 2004; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003), resolve conflict in more constructive ways (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006), solve social reasoning problems more effectively (Reis et al., 2007), are more effective workplace leaders and better coworkers (Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall, & Salovey, 2006; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005), and are less likely to engage in behaviors that pose threats to health and well-being (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004; Rivers, Brackett, Omori, Sickler, & Salovey, 2010; Trinidad & Johnson, 2002). The RULER model of emotional literacy focuses primarily on how the knowledge and skills associated with emotion can be taught to and developed in children and adults. A working assumption of the RULER model is that with accumulated exposure and experience, children and adults can acquire and enhance their emotion knowledge and skills. The Feeling Words Curriculum provides this exposure and experience.

EMOTIONS AND THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Learning climates that systematically enact the view that emotions are central to optimal performance in school, relationships, and personal functioning are relatively rare. Why do emotions matter, and what benefit does integrating emotion have for improving learning environments? We offer four reasons (and there are numerous others).

Reason 1

As the anecdote on teaching the Roman oligarchy illustrates, emotions serve as a passageway for connecting to academic material. If students can relate to the feelings and thoughts of characters in history, in literature, and in current events, they are more likely to be active participants in learning. The ability to pull from existing knowledge when approaching new academic material engenders a sense of self-efficacy (*I know something about this already!*), which is essential to students' feelings of competence in learning (e.g., National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2004). Using prior experience is also an approach advocated in the IRE/NCTE standards.

Reason 2

Emotions—including the lack of emotions—can interfere with learning (and often do), so teaching students (and their teachers) strategies for regulating emotions contributes to optimal learning in countless ways. A student who is angry with a classmate cannot focus on writing a quality essay while he ruminates on the ways in which the classmate affronted him. A student

who is anxious during a standardized test cannot concentrate on the long reading passage or correctly answer the questions that follow. A student who is overly excited about her afternoon basketball game cannot contribute effectively to a classroom debate when her mind is busy visualizing her team's plays. Students need to acquire and develop skills to manage their emotional experiences so that they can focus on and participate in learning (Lopes & Salovey, 2004).

Initiating emotional states, another component of emotion regulation, enhances writing, reading, and critical thinking in numerous ways. Generating feelings of excitement about a topic helps students write more persuasively and creatively and also increases student engagement in classroom discussions and assignments (and decreases boredom, too). Initiating the full range of feelings—loneliness, pride, self-doubt, alienation, regret—allows students to feel with and for others and helps students think more deeply about their classrooms and about the characters from the range of texts used in the classroom (Maurer & Brackett, 2004; Rivers et al., in press).

Reason 3

Experiencing an emotion influences how and what people think as well as their decision-making process. For example, certain types of emotions determine how efficiently and accurately students process information (Bless et al., 1996; Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994; Isen, 2001). When angry from an earlier altercation, a student is likely to think less critically about an assignment and is more likely to rely on stereotypes when drawing inferences about a text. Emotional states influence the perception of information as well (Bodenhausen, Gabriel, & Lineberger, 2000; Gasper & Clore, 2002). A student who is happy after winning a tennis match in gym class is more likely to focus on the “gist” of a story (the big idea), whereas the student who lost the game is likely to focus on specific details of the story, such as a single scene or event. Each student will make different types of contributions to discussions. Their respective performances on an assignment also may vary as a function of their emotional state, with the happy student doing quite well in summarizing the plot but doing poorly at identifying a specific detail of the story and the disappointed student likely to do well on the latter task but less well on the former. Emotions also serve as retrieval cues (Bower, 1981; Eich, 1995). A student who is attentive and interested while reading an article is more likely to remember the information come test time if he or she is again in an attentive state, whereas the student who is anxious during testing will have more difficulty recalling information from the article.

Reason 4

Virtually all social interactions involve emotions. In every culture and subculture there are social norms dictating which emotions are acceptable to

express in specific contexts (e.g., in public vs. private) and the intensity of the emotion that is appropriate to express (e.g., mild vs. extreme anger). For example, it is less acceptable in Asian cultures than it is in Western cultures to express negative emotions such as anger (Argyle, 1986). For many emotions, there also are gender-specific norms for expression (Shields, 2002)—expressing anger generally is considered acceptable for boys but not for girls; the opposite tends to be true for sadness. These social norms, or “display rules,” govern social interactions and dictate the acceptable expression of emotion. Individuals who “break the rules” of emotional expression often encounter negative consequences: A boy who cries on the playground becomes the subject of ridicule by his peers (“cry baby”); a girl who expresses her anger at her friends is labeled as “mean” and someone who just can’t get along with others; a child who expresses too much pride after doing well on a test is called “conceited” by classmates and is ostracized on the playground. Cases of emotional rule breaking permeate the adult world, too: A woman who does not express intense grief when her child is kidnapped becomes a primary suspect in the police investigation; a politician loses standing in the polls once his exuberant outbursts are played (and replayed) on the news; and the names attached to a woman who expresses anger in the workplace are numerous (and not fit to print here). Children who understand the nuances of emotions and their appropriate expression are more likely to be socially competent, to have friends at school, and to be supported by others—and children are more likely to be engaged in learning and to achieve in school when they have quality relationships (e.g., National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002).

THE RULER MODEL OF EMOTIONAL LITERACY

The RULER model of emotional literacy draws upon these four reasons as well as other research showing the importance of emotion and emotion skills to optimal academic, social, and personal functioning (e.g., Brackett et al., 2006; Denham, 1998; Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000). We identify five key emotion skills: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating (i.e., “RULER”). Considering each skill separately is instructive for describing its application in the educational context. However, in practice, the skills are applied concurrently, and the knowledge overlaps. Here we briefly describe each area and highlight its relevance to learning and development, with a particular emphasis on the English language arts.

Recognizing Emotion

One important function of emotions is that they communicate information both interpersonally (between people) and intrapersonally (to the self).

When students accurately identify emotions in themselves and in others, they are able to modify their own behavior and respond in ways appropriate to the situation (Ekman, 2003). Upturned lips and raised cheeks on a friend's face indicate that that friend is approachable; pressed lips, a clenched jaw, narrow eyes, and a tightened brow on a friend's face suggest that now may not be the best time to let the friend know you broke her bike. Feeling an increase in body temperature accompanied by a racing heart and a trembling voice informs a person she is nervous about something, whereas feeling light, warm, and open informs a person she is content with the world. Recognizing the former feeling motivates action to identify and respond to the cause of the nervousness, but the latter feeling suggests that relishing the moment is optimal. Recognizing the nonverbal cues emitted in the face, body, and voice provides information that, when interpreted accurately, helps students to understand the feelings, motivations, and behaviors of themselves and of others—those encountered in person and in texts. Identifying accurately the emotions experienced and expressed by the self and others provides valuable information for understanding the motivations, intentions, and goals of the self and of others (i.e., self- and other-awareness).

Understanding Emotion

Responding effectively to emotions recognized in the self and others is dependent upon the ability to understand the causes and consequences of emotion. There are common causal themes for each of the many emotions people experience: the loss of something meaningful causes sadness, the achievement of an important goal triggers happiness, the blocking of a goal brings forth anger, the real or imagined threat to the self or to significant others initiates fear (e.g., Lazarus, 1991). There are individual and cultural differences as to the specific causes of each emotion, but the themes, nonetheless, are largely universal, and thus the expression of emotions conveys meaning for those recognizing emotional expressions that are transmitted interpersonally (between others) and intrapersonally (within the self; e.g., Ekman, 2003).

Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions allows students to perform a richer behavioral analysis of characters they come across in literature, history, and daily life. Students who understand that a blocked goal causes anger will look for contextual clues reflective of an injustice to locate the impetus for a character's violent outburst. When students identify anger themes across texts they are able to compare and contrast the behaviors of various characters facing analogous situations (e.g., responding to social injustice through violence vs. political activism). Understanding emotion also helps students respond adaptively and in prosocial ways to the positive and negative events they encounter (Greenberg, Kusche, & Riggs, 2004).

For example, a student who understands that she is angry because her friend excluded her at recess is more likely to realize that talking to her friend about the situation will do more to reduce her anger than will yelling at her little brother (Buckley, Storino, & Saarni, 2003). The child who does not know why she feels anger is more likely to take out her anger on her unsuspecting sibling.

Labeling Emotion

A sophisticated feelings vocabulary allows students to speak and write precisely, analytically, and creatively and increases reading comprehension. Accurately labeling emotional experiences and expressions using a rich vocabulary helps students communicate their needs and motivations and discuss those of others. Students with a sophisticated feelings vocabulary differentiate between and use words like *sad*, *disappointed*, *hopeless*, and *discouraged*—rather than more vague words like *bad* or *not great*—when communicating with others orally and in writing. Imagine a teacher's response to a student who says "Not great" versus "I feel discouraged" when asked how he feels upon turning in an assignment. The latter phrase is more likely than the former to provoke the teacher to work with the student to increase confidence with the material. Moreover, consider the content of a discussion between students who label a character's feelings as "bad" versus those who label the character's feelings as "hopeless"—the implications of feeling hopeless are more specific and immediate. The conversation between students who label the feeling as "hopeless" likely will be at a higher level than that between those who label the feeling as "bad." Students with more advanced labeling skills are also able to use and interpret metaphors for emotion—such as *simmering with anger*, *deep pool of despair*. The use and interpretation of figurative language like emotion metaphors fosters deeper exploration of the meaning of feelings and a richer textual analysis.

Expressing Emotion

The expression component of the RULER model relies on knowledge that the outward expression of emotion does not always (and need not always) reflect inner emotional experience (i.e., in the moment, people often do not express the emotions they are feeling). Covering up experienced emotion is a learned skill that children acquire with development (a 2-year-old has difficulty understanding the necessity of smiling at his grandmother upon opening a box containing a hand-knit sweater instead of the truck for which he had been hoping; Saarni, 1999). Children do not come into the world with the ability to adopt the perspectives of others or to comprehend that the inner feelings of others are not always on display. The emotions that are expressed for others to see often are expressed

strategically in ways that allow the expresser to accomplish a goal in that situation. Smiling upon opening the hand-knit sweater makes Grandma feel happy. A mom who is cheerful and calm when dropping her child off at school communicates to the child that school is a happy and safe place to be (even though the mom may be anxious about leaving her child in the care of others).

Expressing emotions that are different from one's inner emotional experience does not mean that the feelings and thoughts that make up the emotion are suppressed, only that they are not expressed in a particular situation. As children acquire this knowledge and begin to practice expressing emotions that do not necessarily align with their inner experience (and encounter others doing the same), they become skilled interpreters of social interaction and are able to analyze the motivations and behaviors of characters they encounter in literature, history, the media, and their daily lives. Moreover, they are better able to follow the social rules for emotional expression, which promotes relationship building and confidence in social settings (e.g., Keltner & Kring, 1998).

Regulating Emotion

Regulating emotion involves changing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to the experience of emotion. Regulating emotion connects intimately to expressing emotion, as changing the outward expression of an emotion is a form of emotion regulation (e.g., not yelling in anger at a teacher, not laughing during a class discussion, covering up disappointment and acting excited when a friend wins first place in a competition). Specifically, emotion regulation involves knowing *how* and *when* to prevent, reduce, initiate, maintain, and enhance the experience and expression of emotions. (We use the acronym PRIME to refer to these emotion regulation goals.)

Students who are able to regulate emotions effectively are not always happy (nor are they never sad, angry, or nervous). Rather, effective emotion regulators experience and express the range of emotions but at the same time are able to modify the experience and expression of emotion to accomplish social and personal goals in school, at home, with friends, and across the situations they encounter (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Students who are able to lessen the experience of intense emotions—positive ones like eagerness and negative ones like distress—are able to focus on tasks such as completing a school project or playing a musical instrument in a recital (Lopes & Salovey, 2004). Effective regulation may involve acknowledging and reducing emotion by practicing more or by engaging in distractor tasks like exercising, which lessens some of the arousal. Learning how to regulate effectively all the myriad emotions is a critical element of the Feeling Words Curriculum, and several components of our programs address the knowledge and skills required to do this.

THE FEELING WORDS CURRICULUM

The Feeling Words Curriculum helps students learn the RULER skills through concrete steps (or lessons) that integrate emotion language (“feeling words”) into existing academic curricula. For the purposes of this article, we emphasize links between this program and learning in the English language arts. Together, the activities making up the steps develop and strengthen students’ RULER skills and build their feelings vocabulary. Moreover, as Figure 1 shows, the Feeling Words Curriculum together with the existing curriculum in the English language arts provides opportunities for students to produce and consume language. Through active engagement in these learning opportunities, students develop not only their RULER skills, but also the ability to write, read, speak, listen, and visually represent information across a range of content, using diverse approaches, for a variety of purposes (see also Table 1). To demonstrate how the Feeling Words Curriculum contributes to the goals of an English language arts education, we describe its five steps as designed for the upper elementary grades.

Table 2 includes a sample of feeling words that are part of the third-through fifth-grade programs. The words that make up the Feeling Words Curriculum across developmental levels (kindergarten to eighth grade) address the core competencies of SEL (i.e., self- and social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship management; Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Bloodworth, et al., 2004). Words are grouped into *word families* that maintain continuity in learning across grade levels. The word families reflect the basic emotions (e.g., happy, sad, angry; e.g., Plutchik, 2003) and the basic developmental needs of children (i.e., the

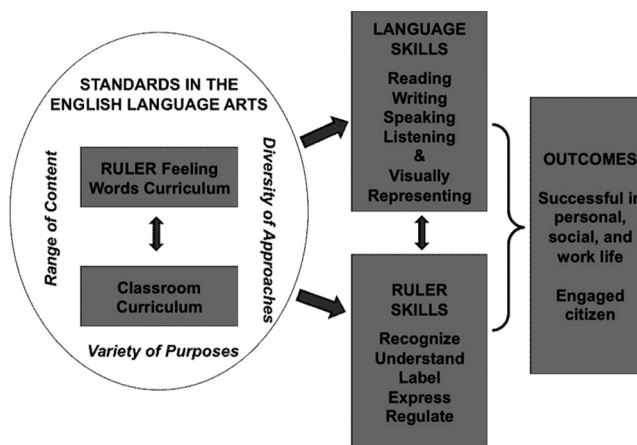


FIGURE 1 The RULER Approach, together with the classroom curriculum, integrates the standards for the English language arts to develop language and RULER skills needed for academic, personal, and social success.

TABLE 2 Examples of Word Families and Feeling Words for Grades 3 Through 5

Word family	Feeling words		
	Third grade	Fourth grade	Fifth grade
happy	satisfied	relieved	ecstatic
sad	disappointed	hopeless	discouraged
angry	enraged	annoyed	aggressive
proud	proud	conceited	modest
empowerment	self-esteem	competent	empowered
excluded	bullied	excluded	prejudiced
accepted	belong	supported	connected
ashamed	ashamed	self-doubt	humiliated

need to feel connected to others, to feel competent in one's abilities, and to feel that one's behavior is self-directed; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Word families include feeling words that closely connect to the larger family term (e.g., *happy* or *excluded*) and that have similar or analogous meanings. For example, the *happy* family for these grade levels includes the words *satisfied*, *relieved*, and *ecstatic*; the *excluded* family includes *bullied*, *excluded*, and *prejudiced*. Teachers pull from the previous year's vocabulary words to teach the current year's vocabulary (e.g., a teacher may use *bullied*, a third-grade word, to help define *excluded* to her fourth-grade students).

As active learners, students acquire more than a vocabulary of feelings when using the Feeling Words Curriculum. The five steps provide hands-on learning opportunities to both acquire the knowledge and practice the skills encompassed by the RULER model of emotional literacy. Accompanying program materials support the formal teaching of the five steps as integrated into the core academic and specialized (e.g., arts, music) curricula as well as informal learning moments that take place between classes, during homeroom, in the lunch room, at recess, and before and after school. For example, the Blueprint is a tool to help students problem-solve about social and personal challenges and plan for future challenges. Drawing on the RULER model and the feeling words, teachers and school administrators use the Blueprint questions to guide students through describing the challenging event and then problem solving ways to handle the situation better the next time it occurs (Brackett, Maurer, et al., in press). For example,

Recognize and Label: What was I feeling? What was the other person feeling?

Understand: What caused me to feel this way? What caused the other person to feel this way?

Express and Regulate: How did I express and regulate my feelings? What did the other person do to express and regulate?

As students become experienced users of the Blueprint, they engage in this problem-solving approach automatically. Thinking about one's own and others' feelings in the context of a conflict is quite powerful in developing empathy. Students say that upon reflecting about their feelings, they begin to consider the impact of their behavior on others and want to change their behavior so that they make others feel happy.

The Five Steps to Developing RULER Skills

Throughout the academic year, teachers introduce a new feeling word approximately every two weeks using five steps: the personal association, academic and real-world link, school-home partnership, creative connection, and strategy-building session. The training workshop and accompanying manual provide easy-to-follow instructions for integrating the steps into the existing curriculum along with optional student graphic organizer worksheets and lesson planning guides. Teachers typically introduce 15 to 18 words a year. Here we present an overview of each step with an example of what the step may look like in a typical English language arts classroom.

THE PERSONAL ASSOCIATION (STEP 1)

Step 1 uses personalized learning to make the content of school lessons especially relevant to all students. Before introducing the new feeling word, teachers guide students to connect their own experiences to the meaning of the word. For example, teachers may introduce a new feeling word (*regret*) by sharing a personal experience ("This weekend was my best friend's birthday, and I forgot to call her to wish her a happy birthday. I feel sorry that I didn't remember her birthday; I know she was upset not to hear from me."). Teachers then ask students to connect the concept to their own experiences ("Have you ever felt sorry about something you did—or forgot to do?") and to share their stories with the class. The personal association engages students in actively thinking about the meaning of the concept. Students draw from their existing knowledge and recall vivid memories of the experience. Sharing experiences with classmates offers opportunities to hone verbal communication skills and allows students to learn about one another. Hearing others' stories encourages students to think about the similarities and differences between experiences with the same feeling, which fosters perspective taking and caring for one another. Teachers also learn more about their students' lives from these discussions, which helps them to better meet students' needs.

Only after several students have shared with the class do teachers formally introduce the word with its definition ("There's a word that means to feel sorry about something you did. That word is *regret*. I feel regret because I did not call to wish my friend a happy birthday."). To reinforce

learning, students write out the formal definition of the word and use the word in writing about the events that caused the emotion (e.g., “I felt ____ because ____.”). In this step, students *recognize* and *label* their emotional experiences and *understand* the causal connection between an event and its consequent emotion.

The process of thinking about and connecting their own experience to the new word helps students to more easily remember and integrate it into their existing vocabulary and knowledge base (Bower, 1981). Moreover, asking students to think about their own experiences during the lesson makes the lesson relevant to all students in the class and increases the likelihood that students will be engaged in learning.

THE ACADEMIC AND REAL-WORLD LINK (STEP 2)

After learning the meaning of the feeling word in Step 1, students connect it to content studied across the curriculum, including the English language arts; social studies; and special subject areas like art, music, and drama. (Math and science teachers have integrated the program successfully into their curricula, too.) Teachers identify relevant content areas and work with students to link the feeling word to a piece of literature, a poem, a history lesson, a current event, a piece of music, or a work of art. Students work individually and then in small groups to analyze the selected topic using the feeling word. Teachers often ask students to link the feeling word across multiple subject areas and topics. The RULER framework guides discussions and analysis of the topic. Sample RULER discussion questions that are applicable for most topics include the following:

- What is the character feeling? (Labeling)
- What evidence suggests the character is feeling that way? (Recognizing)
- What caused the character to feel that way? (Understanding)
- How does the way in which the feeling is expressed help or hurt the character and the character’s relationships? (Expressing)
- What could the character do to prevent feeling this way (or reduce, initiate, maintain, or enhance this feeling)? (Regulating)

This integrated learning approach strengthens knowledge across the curriculum, and the use of emotion makes this especially effective. In the human memory system, emotions link together semantically related information (Bower, 1981). This step facilitates that process by explicitly developing links between ideas and content that otherwise may be kept separate. For example, a student may connect her analysis of a novel’s protagonist (a girl who feels excluded by her friends at school) to a history lesson on the religious uprising that resulted from a government not allowing its citizens to practice their religion. The protagonist and the citizens both experience

feelings related to exclusion—how are the situations the same, how are they different? What are the consequences of feeling excluded in each situation? And so on. Using emotions to connect disparate information also transfers emotional experiences to class material. This transformation is beneficial to learning and knowledge retention; research shows that people more easily remember information that is emotional in nature (Burke, Heuer, & Reisberg, 1992; Cahill et al., 1996; Cahill & McGaugh, 1995).

This step also facilitates the creation of literacy communities in the classroom (IRE/NCTE, 1996b). Students share their responses to texts with their classmates. They make connections between their own and others' experiences with the feeling, as well as their reactions to the text. Through these conversations, students delve deeply into understanding a text using a common starting ground—their feelings. Because all students begin this step with prior knowledge (accessed in Step 1), all students are prepared to read, write, and talk about the text.

THE SCHOOL-HOME PARTNERSHIP (STEP 3)

Step 3 encourages parents, caregivers, and other family members to participate in and contribute to student learning. Regular, structured family discussions are coordinated with classroom lessons. After completing Steps 1 and 2 in class, students “teach” the new feeling word to adult members of their family as homework. They use the same technique used by their teachers in Step 1 (personal association) to interview adult family members about their experiences with the feeling. Students also share their own experiences with the feeling and talk about the content analyzed and discussed in Step 2. Through the process of teaching adults and explaining the specifics of what they did during school lessons, students reinforce their learning across the curriculum and develop their speaking skills.

Involving adult family members in the learning process enriches the learning experience for students and also provides additional opportunities for adult family members to participate in the development of their children. In the discussions that take place during this step, family members learn about the emotional lives of their children, and children learn about the emotional lives of their family members. The discussions that occur in Step 3 provide family members with information about the well-being of their children. Children are likely to share experiences in these discussions that may not come up in regular conversation. This may offer opportunities for family members to provide children with the resources they need to cope with social, academic, and personal challenges of which the family members may not otherwise be aware.

Step 3 also offers regular opportunities for students and their family members to learn about and relate to one another in new, positive ways. When family members inquire about students' feelings and adopt students'

perspectives, the impact on students inevitably will be beneficial—students are likely to feel important, valued, and positive about themselves and are less likely to behave in disruptive ways in order to secure the attention of others (Shure, 2004).

THE CREATIVE CONNECTION (STEP 4)

In Step 4, students communicate their knowledge and ideas about feeling words and academic content through verbal and nonverbal channels. Individually or in groups, students express their understanding of the feeling word using visual representations—drawings, images, symbols, or dramatic performances. Teachers may instruct that the visual representation be abstract (making use of color, texture, sound, etc.) or concrete (involving performing a scene or designing an image from a text). Teachers encourage student creators to think critically about their representations. Students need to explain and justify the connection between the representation and the feeling word. Students present their representation to the class and then deconstruct their creation to explain how it represents the feeling word. Next, student creators and observers engage in discussions about the representation. *In what ways does the image or performance reflect the feeling word? What choices did the creator(s) make in designing the representation? What other choices could the creator(s) have made? What other feelings are evoked by the representation? In what ways does this representation differ from other representations presented? What are the similarities?* In this step, students think innovatively about feeling words and academic content. They express their ideas and knowledge in different ways (visually with images or with their bodies; verbally in discussing the creations) and work cooperatively with their peers to communicate with and about language.

One of the earliest ways children communicate ideas is through visual representations—drawings, paintings, make-believe play, play-dough models, and so on (Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). The act of creating visual representations makes learning in the English language arts fun and active. Moreover, students clarify their understanding of the feeling words and academic content when they visually represent their verbal knowledge. Students demonstrate mastery of the word by connecting verbal emotion knowledge to a creative endeavor (as opposed to rote memorization). This process strengthens understanding and fosters divergent thinking; the result is learning that endures. Furthermore, by making use of their early modes of communication and their creativity, students who may not typically experience learning successes in the classroom do succeed. Students need not conform to one set answer to complete this activity successfully—there are infinite ways to represent a feeling word visually.

The discussion component of Step 4 is critical to the development of language skills, as well as awareness of the self and others. The process of

connecting verbal explanations to visual representations reinforces learning and provides opportunities for students to use and think about language in multiple ways (e.g., transforming a word and its meaning into a visual, non-verbal representation, then applying language to explain the connection between the word and the visual). In addition, because representations vary widely, sharing and hearing others' interpretations gives students practice seeing and understanding the feeling word from multiple perspectives.

THE STRATEGY-BUILDING SESSION (STEP 5)

In the strategy-building session, students critically analyze methods for managing the emotions that they and others experience. The content of the strategy-building session addresses the personal experiences of members of the class (teachers or students) or the experiences of the characters students encounter in the range of content covered in the classroom. Working in collaborative learning groups, students identify a regulation goal for the protagonist (prevent, reduce, initiate, maintain, or enhance the emotion; i.e., PRIME) and brainstorm ideas for how to reach this goal using thinking strategies (e.g., thinking positive thoughts, thinking about the situation in a new way) and behaving strategies (e.g., asking a friend for forgiveness, exercising, watching an uplifting movie, listening to music). Teachers ask students to think about and discuss the consequences of regulating the emotion using the identified courses of action—*How will the strategy impact the character's relationships with others? How will the strategy impact the character's self-esteem and self-confidence? How will it impact performance on a task?* More advanced students examine the effectiveness of different regulation strategies used by various protagonists, comparing and contrasting contextual details that may make a strategy effective for one character but less effective for another.

Discussing effective regulation strategies as a class encourages students to take into consideration others' perspectives when problem solving and to identify solutions that are goal oriented and prosocial. This builds awareness of the self and of others. In the strategy-building sessions, students encounter different points of view, learning that their own ways of thinking about and perceiving the world are sometimes similar to how their classmates think but are also sometimes different. Taking others' feelings and thoughts into consideration is central both to thinking critically about literature and history and to developing empathy for others (those encountered both in real life and in the pages of books).

CONCLUSION

Addressing students' social, emotional, and academic developmental needs is critical for schools to be successful learning communities. The RULER

Feeling Words Curriculum emerged from this need and involves the whole child in the learning process. Invented initially by a teacher who wanted to inspire and engage his students, our current programs integrate scientific theory about and evidence of the importance of emotions and emotion skills in the classroom (captured by the RULER model). Schools that have integrated this approach report increased academic performance and engagement, better relationships (between teachers and students and among students themselves), fewer incidences of expulsions from class, less bullying, and better communication between students and their families.

At the outset, the proposition of integrating an SEL program such as RULER into already overburdened learning environments may appear daunting. Yet it is precisely this environment that makes SEL programs more necessary than ever before. In this article, we have described how our program, when taught within the English language arts curriculum, draws on national learning standards to develop language skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and visually representing information. The Feeling Words Curriculum simultaneously reinforces student learning in the English language arts and develops five critical emotion skills captured by our RULER model (recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate). When used together, as Figure 1 shows, these facilitate reaching the ultimate goals of an English language arts education—preparing students to achieve personal, social, and academic goals and to be engaged and contributing citizens.

One primary way in which the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum contributes to academic, social, and personal success is by creating opportunities for all students to understand and interpret texts. Indeed, IRA/NCTE note that this is a primary purpose of learning in the English language arts:

One of the most important functions of English language arts education is to help students learn to interpret texts—that is, to reflect on textual meaning from their own perspectives—and to evaluate texts—that is, to use critical thinking to identify particular text elements, such as logic, emotional appeal, and purpose. As students interpret and evaluate texts, they explore their own feelings, values, and responses to the ideas presented. Thus, they make their own responses to texts an integral part of their reading experience. (IRA/NCTE, 1996b, p. 23)

Through each step, students connect personally with and are given the opportunity to respond to the range of content within all types of texts (written, spoken, verbal, nonverbal) using a variety of approaches (see Table 1). Specifically, students engage in learning opportunities such as: connecting prior experiences with the content composing the English language arts curriculum, pulling from existing and emerging knowledge to talk about and critically analyze texts at developmentally appropriate levels, reinforcing and extending knowledge by creating visual representations of feeling words

and content, talking about their ideas with classmates, and viewing and interpreting texts from multiple perspectives. These activities are designed to increase self-confidence and engagement in learning, promote self-awareness, and develop an empathic understanding of others (which strengthens social ties in the classroom). Thus, RULER helps students to be better prepared to achieve in the English language arts (and beyond).

The move several states have taken to adopt learning standards in SEL is promising. We are hopeful that advances in the field of SEL will continue to influence policymakers to create legislation that addresses the social and emotional needs of children in schools. The RULER Approach to SEL will help school systems create learning communities that attend to the needs of the whole child; that foster academic, social, and personal success for all children; and that create engaged citizens.

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