**UConn CSCH Podcast - Why Social and Emotional Learning Matters - the Work of Chris Cipriano and Team Transcript**

Helene Marcy: Hello and Welcome to the CSCH Podcast. My name is Helene Marcy, Director of Programs & Communications at the UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health, or CSCH. The CSCH mission is to facilitate innovative and impactful connections across research, policy, and practice arenas to advance equity in school and child health. CSCH is committed to anti-racist work that prioritizes inclusion, reduces disparities, and creates systemic change. I invite you to take a look at our website at csch.uconn.edu.

Recently CSCH Co-Director Sandra Chafouleas spoke with Christina Cipriano, Assistant Professor at the Yale Child Study Center and Director of Research at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. Here is their conversation.

Sandy Chafouleas: Welcome, Chris. We're so glad to have you here today.

Chris Cipriano: Thank you so much for having me.

Sandy: The tagline of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence is emotions matter. Can you talk a little bit about what that means?

Chris: Absolutely. So the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, or YCEI was founded by my colleague, Dr. Mark Brackett. The YCEI is dedicated to leveraging the power of emotion, to create healthier and more equitable, innovative and compassionate communities. In our work as emotion scientists, we center the role of emotion in relationships, in the education of students and training of teachers and adults to help to support all of us to make healthy decisions and be productive contributors to our society.

Sandy: Wow! That's a lot, right. And centering emotions is definitely something that we certainly here at at CSCH have been working on as we look at the whole child in the work that we're doing with schools. So could you describe some of the questions that you and your team are currently exploring in this work?

Chris: Absolutely. So the past couple of years in particular, we've really been invested in thinking about the what, how and who of emotion science and social emotional learning, and leading the field at the forefront of review work that's helping to explicate and understand the differences and types of school-based emotional intelligence or social emotional learning programming, to understand kind of the levers for change within them what the types of outcomes are that we can expect as a result of school based social, emotional learning, programming. And I personally have a deep vested interest in helping us to unpack and understand how student and educator intersectional identities play out in the way we think about emotion science in schools. And so we're really invested in that? What it is? What is social emotional learning? How do we understand that unpack it? How is it engaged? So what are the pedagogies and practices of SEL. And then who is benefiting, and how on what outcomes?

Sandy: And your work really is quite nationwide. I mean, you're everywhere. Could you give us, maybe a couple of examples about the kinds of projects that you just mentioned?

Chris: Absolutely Absolutely. So one project that I’m currently running is an IES-funded project to develop the SEL observation checklist, or the SELOC for elementary schools, and this is a partnership with 50 school leaders and 300 classrooms nested across the country over a 4-year period, where we have worked in collaboration to unpack the pedagogies of SEL. So the how of social emotional teaching in the classroom and designed a checklist that supports coaches or leaders in the school to inform how teachers are teaching in their social emotional practice. So it could be when they're using an SEL approach or program like RULER or Second Step or PATHS. But it also can be when they're you know, using their their math lesson or their reading lesson, and the ways in which a social emotional teaching show up in classrooms.

What I think is, you know personally most exciting about this project is that we we undergird the SELOC items with a focus on equity and inclusion in the ways in which we understand and attend to learner emotion, variability, and expression and regulation. So what we've learned over the past couple of years in partnership with our colleagues across the country is that we're having, you know, recognition of our own kind of implicit biases that we bring into our teaching practices and helping to raise awareness as a community on how we understand and see our students, for who they are not, who is, you know, educators we may sometimes imagine they might be. And so the SELOC is moving into its last year. Next school year will be its last year of our validation work, and then at the end of that it will be a free and publicly available tool for elementary schools across the nation to adopt.

Sandy: Oh, I can't wait to have that in my my battery. As as you might know, or maybe don't know if my background is actually as a school psychologist. So to have this kind of a tool, if I’d had it 20 years ago, when I was practicing, would have certainly improved the kinds of things that I was doing with teachers. With the measure, is it expected that teachers could could do this and implement it on their own? Or do you see it in, or is using it within like team-based supports.

Chris: Yeah, yeah. Great question. And thank you so much for that compliment. It'd be an honor to have your team and and for you to use it in your research. And so it's meant to be for a a coach or a peer teacher to support in conducting an observation and kind of moving down the checklist items, and then the debrief with the teacher to kind of reflect on... You know they self evaluate before, and then what was observed, and how, so that we could help to support, to kind of increase the the quality of teaching practices really with that with that center on the equitable and inclusive practices within their classrooms.

Sandy: That certainly makes a lot of sense, ‘cause it's really hard to do all of this on your own right. As a single person and a classroom teacher. It's hard to pay attention to all of the different things, and so it's helpful to have partners.

Chris: Absolutely absolutely. So we're....we're quite excited about it, and I mean, given the challenges of the past couple of years and all that our school communities have and our nation has been moving through, the fact that we've been able to have partners working with us and engage in this process has really been kind of a testament to folks wanting it and seeing it as a critical need in schools right now across the country.

Sandy: Yeah, it's like super super important. I like to try to think about some of the positives, maybe, that come out of Covid and all the experiences that we're having now, and the SEL parts have gone from, “Well, maybe that's kind of important” to “No. This is like critically important.” So I’m I’m glad to know that that’s— you found that in your work as well, too. So what are, what's next? Cause like just doing that measure I'm sure you're not going to stop. What are some of the long-term goals for the research? And what do you hope to contribute for students and teachers?

Chris: Absolutely. So you know, in my in my work and with our team, we are actually moving into an exciting kind of next phase as of July first. So we'll be launching our own independent lab at Yale called the Education Collaboratory at Yale. W’ell, we'll be working to advance the science and practice of SEL in collaboration with partnerships across the country and really helping to move this work and the implementation science work to the next phase. Something that I've been saying for a while that we we we’ve adopted in the lab is that, you know, if we want something different in SEL and research, then we need to do something differently. And so in this next phase of work for our team, we will take our science and practice and evolve it to the next level in collaboration with the school support agencies, districts, and state level partners to help to understand the many models of SEL implementation. To start to be specific about the types of social emotional learning programming that are used. To begin to help to support the evolution of the operational definition of SEL with our with our team’s review work that's currently at the kind of forefront of the national discourse, and hopefully helping to support policy and policy recommendations in light of you know, many much of the funding that was earmarked for Covid response and relief and restoration efforts coming to a close, concurrent to the kind of politicization of social emotional learning in the national discourse. And so we see ourselves as a change agents and partners in that process, and are very excited to kind of move that work to the next level. There's there's there's a couple of projects I can speak to, but maybe two that I’ll draw some attention to while we've got a minute. One is that our team recently completed the update and evolution to the SEL field seminal paper. So we updated and evolved the Durlak 2011 paper from *Child Development*…cite a justification for SEL. And so our review paper is coming out very soon. So any any day now the pre print is up in in *Child Development* and we reviewed over 400 SEL studies from worldwide, representing over 50 countries, looking at an expanded set of outcomes over 12 domains of outcomes and found significant effects for students. You know, not just in achievement, although I know lots of folks in the field are very excited about the achievement findings, but also really getting deep into thinking about what skills and strategies students are are benefiting from when engage in SEL, like pro-sociality development, civic engagement development, peer socialization, outcomes and a school climate and experiences of safety at school, which arguably couldn't be more important right now in our country. So we're excited about this review work and kind of continuing on this review work, journey in an open science way…

Sandy: I have to interrupt for one second. And just say I am beyond excited about that. I've actually already cited your pre-print, so I can't wait to see it out as well. So - good job. It was , It was time for the update and I'm glad somebody did it. So nice job.

Chris: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. And it was absolutely in partnership with our our tremendous team of colleagues at Yale and across the nation who leaned in on that work. Definitely a labor of love. But very excited to see how that will continue to support the next generation of scholarship for SEL. A second project that I would just kind of raise in kind of thinking about, you know, what does it look like to do things differently. I have the honor of being partnered with two incredible community organizations, the Urban Assembly and Trajectory of Hope and we're engaged on a multi-year journey right now, where we are cataloging and understanding what it takes to really do SEL work in schools that is sustainable towards the end of racial equity and social justice. And so we are actually have placed full-time staff members in all of the school partners that we're working with across the country and following their journeys on kind of understanding and you know the difficult conversations that they're being confronted with, and the ways in which communities are engaging around, SEL and racial equity and what are the opportunities to support implementation using the SEL assessments that our team and others have developed along the way as information and intervention to support actionable and sustainable change in schools. And we're really hopeful that in a couple of years from now we'll be able to come back and say, you know, here's a a whole menu of case studies. Because we know it doesn't—it's not a one size fits all thing right. And so here's a menu of case studies of all the different ways in which this work can look. And here is kind of the resources that it took for different schools across the country, and we're hoping that will be some great models for folks who are, you know, interested in engaging, but maybe not sure what it takes, or for funders who are interested in investing and not sure what it takes and what research, part-- community partnerships can look like. So really excited about that. Stay tuned, more to come on it. We're just at the beginnings of that work. Just in that, we’re just finishing up our pilot year, but really hopeful for what that work can bring to the field.

Sandy: We're very hopeful as well, and it's definitely a needed contribution. We started to talk a little bit about priority shifts that have happened in the wake of events in recent years, and certainly your last project is a good example of that. Are there other ways that you could describe that your personal or your own research teams and priorities have shifted in recent years?

Chris: You know, I don't know that our agendas shifted as much as it has been notable to us that the attention our work is getting, is much more pronounced than it ever was before. And so I entered the SEL research space over a decade ago now, with the focus on marginalized student and educator populations and so students with disabilities and the intersectionalities there within. And that still is at the heart of the work when I talk about the who, in kind of the ways in which I engage in the space. And you know, up until a couple of years ago, not many folks at the top tier kind of like, you know, at the at the R1 level, if you will, if you will were kind of taking note there. They were kind of othering the agenda that my team and I had, and so the pandemic has in in many ways kind of shined a brighter light on the work that our team is engaged in, and has generated a lot more attention and interest in a way that was very surprising for us, and and also very much kind of like it couldn't—it was about time. It was about time.

Sandy: It was about time. That's I think that's the good summary statement, right? It was about time, and so so again, very glad. So this is kind of my last question. Maybe this is a big thinker. If you had to pick only one, what would you choose as the biggest unresolved question in the work, in SEL.

Chris: It is a big question, so…

Sandy: I know, ‘cause we have like 50 right? Or if not 50 million, yeah…

Chris: So many. I mean it, it really is that that it centers in the for who and how/under what conditions piece. So when we think about how student intersectional identities are, are being engaged and being supported within social emotional learning programs, the wide heterogeneity in the programs themselves, the variability in the implementation of fidelity of those programs. And then, of course, you know all of that overlaid on the socio-political climate with which they're being inves—, you know, implemented in right now, cannot be overlooked. And so. I guess I just named 37 questions in that answer. But to me it it's really kind of thinking about that, and I think that differential effects analysis, our review papers are, you know, starting to help to move the field in that direction. I can, You know I intend to, with my colleagues continuing that work and pushing that work forward for us to advance research, methodological practices, as well as, you know, ways in which we can help to support folks to understand that, you know variability and experience in school based SEL is the norm, not the exception. And so we must be kind of reporting in a way that helps us to untangle and disentangle that piece. And I hope that in a couple of years from now I'm not saying it's such a big question, and rather that we're kind of maybe moving more into a space where we have kind of some solid footing to stand on.

Sandy: I I think you took those 50 million, and we combined them into one big question. So I think that was a pretty good job. Well, well done for sure.

Chris: Thank you. Thank you.

Sandy: Chris, we want to thank you so much for joining us today. It's been such a pleasure to always connect to connect with you whenever we can, and and hear about all the things that you're doing.

Chris: Thank you. Thank you so much for the opportunity to share. I look forward to future partnership.

Helene: Thanks for listening to our interview with Christina Cipriano. We’ll also add links to the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and its work in the podcast description. And finally a reminder to our listeners that you can find information about the Collaboratory at our website, csch.uconn.edu. You can also follow us on social media @UConnCSCH. Thanks for listening.