

Modern Manners & Mental Fortitude: Life Prep for Middle Schoolers

Michael Terry

Education Department, Columbia College

EDUC 504 ADE - CURRICULUM DESIGN AND EVALUATION

Dr. William Hanna

August 3, 2025

Curriculum Master Plan (CMP)

Introduction and Rationale

Students in today's middle schools face increasing challenges regarding their interpersonal and coping abilities even though they experience a globally connected world unlike any previous generations. Academic achievement dominates school curriculums, leaving social-emotional learning (SEL) and character education with minimal dedicated time during the school day. Meanwhile, young people have increasingly complex social, digital, and emotional landscapes to negotiate and few skills for doing so (Tough, 2012; CASEL, 2020).

As a parent of five children and a public servant, I have been keenly aware of the broad impact that poor social-emotional regulation and interpersonal conflict have in the world around me. My son will begin 7th grade this year, and this would be the curriculum I would choose for him to experience. My goal is for him to develop respectful self-advocacy confidence and build emotional strength to overcome embarrassment and rejection while also acquiring social skills to decode the confusing world around him. This CMP is created with a personal stake in its success in addition to academic and professional ones. I will be investing time and energy into this in the hopes of equipping the young people in my life with tools that will serve them, and those around them, well into adulthood.

This CMP will help to fill a critical gap in middle school programming by designing a semester-long curriculum for developing the practice-based skills of self-

regulation, respectful communication, conflict resolution, and digital and modern etiquette. These crucial “soft” skills are mostly learned outside of the classroom but are vitally important for effective academic performance, emotional well-being, and life and societal contributions (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The curriculum incorporates foundational theories and best practices of curriculum design and development from Wiles and Bondi's (2015) work and includes core concepts from Tyler (1949), Bruner (1960), Dewey (1938), and Skinner (1953). The curriculum also seeks to create confident, respectful, emotionally grounded adults from young people.

Goals and Objectives

Tyler's (1949) model of curriculum development requires that goals for educational experience be intentional, measurable, and aligned with student needs. The CMP is guided by the following goals:

- Students will learn to recognize respectful communication approaches and actively use them in interactions.
- Students will learn and utilize effective strategies for handling stress and emotional triggers along with anxiety.
- Students will demonstrate modern etiquette suitable for school settings, public spaces, and digital interactions.
- Students will address peer conflicts through evaluation and deployment of their learned conflict resolution methods.
- Students will establish their growth targets and monitor their self-assessment progress over time.

This curriculum presents performance-based goals that make student engagement measurable and observable. Weekly instructional practices receive support through strategically placed unit objectives. For example, in Week 3, a measurable objective is as follows: Students will learn and show three ways to respond respectfully to disagreements between their peers by practicing with sentence stems and role-playing activities.

Design

Curriculum Audience: This CMP is designed for 7th grade students across diverse backgrounds. It assumes minimal prior experience in social-emotional programming and no requirement for parental involvement, though take-home extensions are included. Teachers who lead advisory or homeroom blocks will deliver the curriculum with support from campus counselors and guest mentors.

Content Strands:

1. Current Etiquette (eye contact, cell phone, greetings, thank you)
2. EQ (self-awareness, triggers, mindfulness)
3. Conflict (Arguing without sinning, apologies, setting boundaries)
4. Internet (Tone, posts, responses, reputation)
5. Self (Goals, self-evaluation, character)

Sequence and Organization: The lessons and activities within the units will be sequenced based on Bruner's (1960) spiral curriculum approach, in which the learners will circle back to certain core concepts (such as effective communication, setting

boundaries) as they progress through each of the units, but will be expected to understand and apply these concepts in more complex ways as the units progress.

- Two weeks of instruction using direct modeling and student-led discussion
- One week of simulation or role-play to apply learned skills
- One week of collaborative challenge or team reflection to reinforce understanding

This cycle not only improves retention but also provides varied ways for students to demonstrate learning.

Standards Alignment: The course aligns with the CASEL (2020) Core SEL Competencies and can be cross-walked with Utah's College and Career Awareness Core Standards (Utah State Board of Education, 2023), specifically in areas of self-management, interpersonal communication, responsible decision-making, and digital citizenship. It also aligns with middle school Counseling Program Standards related to emotional development and social behavior (National Middle School Association, 2010).

Implementation Plan

Timeframe:

- 16-week semester
- Two 45-minute lessons per week

Instructional Strategies:

- Role-playing and scenario simulation
- Team challenges and "practice rounds"
- Guest speakers (veterans, first responders, community/business leaders)
- Peer interviews, guided journaling, and story analysis

- Weekly “Manners in Motion” challenge to practice skills in real-time

Materials Needed:

- Student journals or digital reflection logs
- Social scenario prompt cards
- Seating for group discussions
- Basic props for etiquette or simulation activities (napkins, phones, chairs, etc.)
- “Manners Challenge Cards” (e.g., hold a door for someone, give a compliment, etc.)

Staff Preparation:

- One-day teacher workshop on delivery, SEL integration, and managing group dynamics (Wiles & Bondi, 2015)
- Resource folder with scope and sequence, weekly objective sheets, sample rubrics, and reflection prompts

Sample Implementation Products:

- Semester pacing calendar
- Sample classroom welcome letter explaining the CMP to families
- Template for teacher journaling and student observation checklists

Evaluation Plan

Student Assessment: Assessment tools will include both formative and summative evaluations:

- Weekly self-reflection logs with guided prompts (formative) (Dewey, 1938)

- Performance-based rubrics for etiquette and conflict resolution simulations (summative)
- Peer-to-peer evaluations using structured observation tools (Skinner, 1953)
- Capstone project: "How I Handle It" presentation where students describe a personal or hypothetical scenario and how they would apply course strategies

Program Evaluation: Evaluation of the CMP will be ongoing, consistent with Wiles and Bondi's (2015) emphasis on continuous improvement. Methods include:

- Pre/post student self-efficacy surveys (based on CASEL competencies)
- Implementation surveys from participating teachers
- Feedback forms from guest speakers and school counselors
- Optional parent surveys to gauge perceived changes in student behavior

The program will also incorporate elements of backward design by aligning capstone performance expectations with unit objectives and overall course goals (Tyler, 1949).

Theoretical Foundations

- Tyler (1949): Objectives-based model ensures clear, assessable outcomes.
- Bruner (1960): Spiral curriculum design to enhance recall and promote multi-layered learning.
- Dewey (1938): Supports project-based learning with real-world role play and simulations.
- Skinner (1953): Behavior is reinforced through operant conditioning, which will be built-in through immediate, positive peer feedback and instructor recognition.

- Wiles & Bondi (2015): CMP embedded through W&B's curriculum planning model of logical, seamless links between context, goals, implementation, and evaluation.
- CASEL (2020): SEL is interwoven throughout to target both thinking and feeling domains of learning.
- Tough (2012): Recognizes and supports the role of grit and perseverance in adolescent development.
- Trilling & Fadel (2009): SEL blends with 21st century skills that require multiple dimensions of social, emotional and cognitive growth.
- National Middle School Association (2010): Highlights adolescent development as an essential context for all curricular decisions.

Program Organization & Facilities

The CMP is best implemented in classrooms that allow flexible seating for small-group discussions and open space for role-playing activities. Access to a projector or whiteboard is recommended for modeling and instructional videos. The course may be delivered during advisory periods, homeroom blocks, or as a standalone semester elective. Optimal class size is 20–25 students to ensure meaningful participation, peer feedback, and safe space for personal sharing. Facilities should also support access to community guest speakers, and school counselors or paraprofessionals may co-facilitate select lessons.

Evaluation Aligned to Goals

Each of the five course goals has a corresponding evaluation method. For example, Goal 1 (recognizing and using respectful communication) is assessed through peer role-play and sentence-stem performance rubrics. Goal 2 (handling stress and triggers) is tracked through weekly guided journaling and the final presentation. Goal 3 (modern etiquette) is evaluated using performance tasks and the ‘Manners in Motion’ challenges. Goal 4 (conflict resolution) is assessed through peer observation checklists during scenario simulations. Goal 5 (self-assessment and growth) is measured using pre/post self-efficacy surveys and teacher-student conferences.

References

- Bruner, J. S. (1960). *The process of education*. Harvard University Press.
- CASEL. (2020). *Core SEL Competencies*. <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.
- National Middle School Association. (2010). *This we believe: Keys to educating young adolescents*. National Middle School Association.
- Skinner, B. F. (1953). *Science and human behavior*. Macmillan.
- Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2009). *21st century skills: Learning for life in our times*. Jossey-Bass.
- Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Tyler, R. W. (1949). Basic principles of curriculum and instruction. University of Chicago Press.

Utah State Board of Education. (2023). College and Career Awareness Core Standards.
<https://www.schools.utah.gov>

Wiles, J. W., & Bondi, J. C. (2015). Curriculum development: A guide to practice (9th ed.). Pearson.