

The PEAR Institute's The Clover Model

Overview

The Clover Model is a Developmental Process Theory (DPT) that was designed to illustrate the interconnection among four key youth development domains and describe the experience of transitioning from infancy to adulthood. The model is not intended to provide a comprehensive list of every competency a young person should acquire across a lifetime. It is an intentional simplification that focuses on the four minimum elements needed for youth to thrive:

- **Active Engagement:** Physically connecting to and engaging with the world.
- **Assertiveness:** Having agency and self-efficacy, the ability to negotiate one's self in relation to others and make decisions, developing a voice and a desire to express wants and needs.
- **Belonging:** Building strong relationships with peers and adults, group acceptance, and group identity.
- **Reflection:** Making sense of one's own experiences, emotions, and thoughts to create a sense of personal identity including the need to create and make meaning, as well as the desire for self-knowledge and understanding the meaning of existence.

History of the Framework

The Clover Model framework derives from the developmental psychology tradition (e.g., Erickson, Piaget), which describes human development in terms of stages: from a physical, more impulsive self to an abstract, reflective self. In Dr. Gil Noam's training and research as a clinical psychologist, he noted that self, emotional, and relational

The Clover Model: A Developmental Process Theory of Social-Emotional Development

The PEAR Institute

The Clover Model was created as part of the social-emotional development movement to explain the impact of physical, cognitive, and social development on the ways young people learn, behave, and interact with others. The model is designed to align with their national development to help build the social-emotional competencies youth need to thrive.

- Gil Noam

The briefs in this 10-part series each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.

Author:

Teresa Borowski
University of Illinois at Chicago

development were difficult to compartmentalize into stages in the same way cognition can be divided into stages. For example, he noted impulsivity – a behavior often associated with younger children – was seen in adults. To accommodate this notion, Noam developed the Clover Model based on years of research and practical experience. Noam proposed four domains that align with developmental psychology: active engagement, assertiveness, belonging, and reflection. The model presents these domains as existing in children from birth and emphasizes the interplay among them, shifting away from a linear or stepwise model. Although each domain has a specified age, known as an age of specialization, where developers suggest users emphasize this domain, it is important to note that all domains are continually “updating” throughout development. The framework focuses on the developmental process (what the framework calls “updating”) and takes into account the windows of time when children and youth are most receptive to exploring and adopting certain skills, such as perseverance, emotion management, and teamwork. The process of updating, or development, is about more than specific school-based curriculum or intervention, it is about combining social-emotional learning with developmentally appropriate timing to help youth thrive. Striving for balance between the four domains, represented as leaves, of the Clover can help adults and students achieve positive mental health. The framework establishes a common language that can be used to communicate the strengths and challenges of children and youth.

COMPETENCIES NAMED IN THIS FRAMEWORK

- ✓ Active engagement
- ✓ Assertiveness
- ✓ Belonging
- ✓ Reflection

Purpose and Intended Audience

The Clover Model was designed for use as a unified framework of youth development that could serve as a common language for youth workers, educators, and families to discuss and understand youth development. The primary audience is educators mostly in school, but also in out-of-school time settings. Additionally, framework developers avoided jargon so that parents and students could use and understand the framework as a dynamic, interconnected tool.

Settings

The Clover Model is used as a unifying framework for training, research, and student support in schools, afterschool programs, and youth development organizations. For example, the PEAR Institute applied the Clover Model to interventions and programs for students in collaboration with educational practitioners in the afterschool field through the Responsive Advocacy for Life and Learning in Youth (RALLY) Program. Additionally, in a multiyear collaboration with City Year – a youth-serving organization working in 28 cities across the U.S. to help close the school achievement gap – researchers used the Clover Model to understand young people and to promote organizational change.



Criteria Ratings: Conceptual Clarity

FIVE CONCEPTUAL CLARITY CRITERIA			
CRITERIA	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Specificity	For each of the four domains, a definition is provided that identifies the types of competencies and areas of focus within the domain. However, more specific skills and observable behaviors are not provided for each.		
Balance	The domains are balanced in that they include both intrapersonal (reflection) and interpersonal (belonging) domains as well as internalizing (e.g., reflection) and externalizing domains (e.g., active engagement). The domains capture self, other, action, and thought.		
Developmental	The framework provides a description of the process of each domain throughout development: early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, and late adolescence. While all four domains exist during all phases of development, the framework identifies the age of specialization as well as needs and how to support healthy development within each domain.		
Culturally Sensitive	Not directly discussed or addressed. The developers acknowledge that the domains are culturally embedded and that they may be expressed differently depending on culture.		
Empirically Grounded	The Clover Model was the result of over two decades of comparative research across various developmental models by Dr. Gil G. Noam. The process of developing the framework included three stages: initial research through literature reviews and field interviews; the application of the model to practice through partnerships with schools and afterschool programs; and the connection of the model to a student self-report assessment to validate and refine the theory with student data.		
<p><i>These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in this brief and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the introductory brief to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particular context.</i></p>			

Criteria Ratings: Implementation Support

FIVE IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT CRITERIA			
CRITERIA	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Intended for Practice	The framework provides general guidance on what schools can do to influence children’s development in each of the domains and is helpful in identifying the basic needs young people have. Developers avoided jargon, used simple language, and narrowed the scope to only four domains to facilitate use by practitioners.		
Resources for Practitioners	PEAR released an overview publication that provides general information on the framework. Training on applying the Clover Model to educational settings is provided to schools and programs - varying from a few hours to multiday courses. Additionally, data reporting, sharing, and use is supported through coaching. Curricula based on the framework and its applications are co-developed with schools or organizations to fit their unique needs. Finally, webinars and other information sharing activities are provided. The Clover Model overview publication and the Holistic Student Assessment, a youth self-report tool based on the Clover Model, are available on PEAR’s website.		
Resources for Use with Children and Youth	Retrospective Holistic Student Assessments (HSA) are taken by students and the results are used to create priorities for supporting social-emotional development. For example, students are asked what they would like to work on or strengthen. Many resources are developed in partnership with schools (rather than created by the developer and publicly available).		
Resources for Measurement and Data Use	The Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) is aligned with the Clover Model. The traditional HSA has 14 scales, and the short version includes 10 scales corresponding to the four domains (two each except for Belonging, which has four scales). The retrospective HSA captures youth change during either a school year or over the course of a program. Additionally, some classrooms use a Clover-based observation scale. Data is collected at multiple time points and reported back through Qualtrics within 2-5 days using dynamic, actionable data visualizations. Coaches help schools with data interpretation and to create strategies based on the data.		
Empirically Tested	To test and explore the strength of the Clover Model, PEAR has used the framework over the past 10 years in the delivery of training, research, and student support in schools, afterschool programs, and youth development organizations. Strongly grounded in implementation science, developers have jointly conducted evaluations with their clients. For example, City Year used pre/post self-report and direct assessments to examine change over time along SEL and educational dimensions. Some groups also examined SEL and its relationship to academic outcomes. Future publications will share findings.		

These ratings are intended to help illustrate the strengths and limits of some popular frameworks. They are neither designed to formally compare frameworks nor endorse any framework. The ratings are based on criteria defined more fully in [this brief](#) and the process of rating and appropriate uses are discussed in the [introductory brief](#) to this series. We urge practitioners to review these and prioritize which criteria are most important for use in their particular context.

Summary of the Framework

In response to the need for a simple model of development that is valid from birth through adulthood and not limited to a linear, stepwise view, Dr. Gil Noam developed the Clover Model, which highlights four essential elements that people of all ages need in order to thrive, learn, and develop: Active Engagement, Assertiveness, Belonging, and Reflection. The Clover Model is simple, research-based, functional, and flexible enough to apply to all phases of human development. Future publications from the PEAR Institute will explore how the Clover Model has been used in the field by partners, the connection between the model and mental health, its application to educational practice, the latest research based on the model, and its connection to the newest psychopathology literature.

About the Developer



The PEAR Institute: Partnerships in Education and Resilience is a nonprofit organization created to make meaningful theoretical and practical contributions to youth

development, educational innovation, and mental health so that young people can learn, dream, and thrive. Based on a belief that high-quality programming can build youth social-emotional resiliency and contribute to school and life success, Dr. Gil G. Noam founded the institute in 1999 as a collaboration between the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Harvard Medical School before relocating to McLean Hospital. The PEAR Institute takes a developmental approach to the study of new models of effective educational programming and incorporates educational, health, public policy, and psychological perspectives. Its programs and projects are a part of a number of schools and afterschool programs across the United States and internationally. PEAR has created an integrated student support system that includes tools and services, all based on scientific research. The integration of the Clover Model into educational practice is an example of The PEAR Institute's translational research approach in action.

About the Author



TERESA BOROWSKI, M.A.
University of Illinois at Chicago

Teresa Borowski is a graduate student in the Community and Prevention Research PhD program in Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where her research focuses on social-emotional competence development, particularly through dance and other arts. She works as a research specialist with CASEL's research team and the

Frameworks subgroup of the Assessment Work Group. She is also the co-editor of Measuring SEL's blog. Prior to UIC, Teresa worked as a research assistant in the Infant Cognition Lab and the Cultural Studio at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and for the Learning and Memory Lab at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology.

References

- Noam, G. G., & Triggs, B. (2018). The Clover Model: A developmental process theory of social-emotional development. The PEAR Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.thepearinstitute.org/clover-model-overview>
- Noam, G. G. (1985). Stage, phase, and style: The developmental dynamics of the self. In M. Berkowitz & F. Oser (Eds.), *Moral education: Theory and application*, 321–346. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Noam, G. G. (1988). Self-complexity and self-integration: Theory and therapy in clinical-developmental psychology. *Journal of Moral Education*, 17(3), 230–245. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000278376>
- Noam, G. G. (1996). High-risk youth: Transforming our understanding of human development. *Human Development*, 39(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000278376>
- Noam, G. G. (1999a). Solving the ego development-mental health riddle. In M. Westenberg, L. Cohen, & A. Blasi (Eds.), *Personality development: Theoretical, empirical, and clinical investigations of Loevinger's conception of ego development*, 271–295. New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Noam, G. G. (1999b). The psychology of belonging: Reformulating adolescent development. In A. H. Esman, L. T. Flaherty, & Horowitz, Harvey A. (Eds.), *Adolescent psychiatry: Development and clinical studies*, 24, 49–68. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Noam, G. G., & Hermann, C. A. (2002). Where education and mental health meet: developmental prevention and early intervention in schools. *Development and Psychopathology*, 14(4), 861–875.
- Noam, G. G., & Malti, T. (2008). Responding to the crisis: RALLY's developmental and relational approach. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2008(120), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ym.284>

Useful Links to Explore

- Clover Model overview: <https://www.thepearinstitute.org/clover-model>

The Measuring SEL Series of Frameworks Briefs

The Establishing Practical Social-Emotional Competence Assessments of Preschool to High School Students project as guided by the Assessment Work Group (AWG) is dedicated to helping advance the effective use of data to inspire practice in SEL. In deciding how the AWG could best contribute to advancing the field and complement rather than compete with other efforts underway to address the challenges of multiple frameworks and inconsistent use of language, the AWG Frameworks Subgroup, led by Stephanie Jones and Roger Weissberg, developed four series of briefs designed for practitioners. Each series and each brief in the series is designed to help advance how people think about the issues and make reasonable choices that work best for them and their context. We hope they provide a set of “building blocks” that systems and practitioners can use to advance and improve their SEL efforts. Learn more at <https://measuringSEL.casel.org>

Introductory Series

These briefs are about what frameworks are, how they are useful, the challenges and opportunities they present in practice, and defining criteria that are helpful when considering what frameworks to use.

Comparative Series

These briefs explore efforts underway to categorize and align ways of thinking about comparing unique frameworks. The briefs also describe tools available to aid systems and practitioners in their selection and use of a framework.

Special Issues Series

These briefs identify critical issues that frameworks must address or that influence how they are used that are important to consider when selecting and using frameworks, such as equity and SEL, and developmental considerations.

Descriptive Series

These briefs each describe an individual framework currently in use. They are intended to illustrate how frameworks can be analyzed and help practitioners learn to evaluate frameworks on the types of criteria that matter most in their settings. *(The briefs are not an endorsement of these frameworks.)*

The Assessment Work Group is committed to advancing dialogue on key issues in the field and stating a perspective when appropriate. The views and opinions expressed in these briefs reflect the general position of the Assessment Work Group. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CASEL or any of the individual organizations involved with the work group.