

## Teaching as *Consolatio*: Re-imagining the Teacher-Student Dynamic in Times of Emergency

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### ABSTRACT

In this essay, I argue that the massive change in educational circumstances brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic require a similarly drastic shift in pedagogical approach from classics teachers. In particular, I argue that classicists of all kinds have much to gain from reflecting on (i) an ancient literary tradition, i.e., the genre of the epistolary *Consolatio* in ancient philosophy (especially Stoicism and Epicureanism), to help both themselves and their students regain a sense of purpose and relevance in their classical studies, and incorporating (ii) insights from contemporary theory in social and emotional learning (SEL) in their teaching practice. Together, I think these can help us to reimagine our teaching roles during this time of unprecedented emergency as one of *consolator-discipulus* rather than just *magister-discipulus*.

### 1. Introduction

This proposal is borne of the deleterious mental health effects of the pandemic—that they stand to raise student and teacher anxiety, depression, and economic insecurity to critical levels—and the drastic changes in the material circumstances of teaching (i.e., the widespread shift to online asynchronous learning with partial or no access to synchronous real-time interaction).<sup>1</sup> It also comes as a result of my lived experience as a high school teacher of Latin: My students, suffering under the uncertainty, stress, and death of the pandemic, were desirous of some amount of solace, perspective, or consolation from me, ancient literature and philosophy, or both.

In other words: I ask that we re-imagine our role as educators during this period (and, frankly, in succeeding ones) according to Stoic models of the teacher as “co-learner”

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<sup>1</sup> For a psychiatric perspective on the current Covid-19 crisis, see Galea et al. 2020 and Amsalem et al. 2020. For a popular summary of the situation and possibilities and limitations of online education, see Benedict Carey’s June 13 piece in the *New York Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/13/health/school-learning-online-education.html>. For the clear social-pedagogical risks associated with asynchronous online education, see this special issue in *Science*: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/363/6423/130>.

or, especially, as fellow *proficientes* ('ones making progress'), so that we can best meet the emotional needs of our students and of ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

As part of that aim of effective, emotionally uplifting co-learning in a consolatory spirit, I draw from contemporary research into the importance of emotional cultivation and regulation in the classroom to guide teaching practice. In particular, I incorporate teaching activities that build on an understanding of Mayer and Salovey's Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence and which follow the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence RULER approach.<sup>3</sup>

I pair my proposal with some practical suggestions for how we might implement it. In particular, I draw from student-centered, reflection-based asynchronous and synchronous classwork in my Beginning Latin courses this term that encourages solitary student emotional growth and reflection, virtual Harkness discussions in my classes on ancient Stoic texts, and journaling assignments on negative and/or unsettling emotions.

Together, I hope this proposal and practical suggestions show a way forward for classics teachers (and especially Latin instructors) in this time of emergency: As crafters of a distance *consolatio* for our students for the foreseeable future, as we *all* aim to recognize, understand, and regulate our emotions in extreme circumstances.

## 2. The Consolatory Genre in Antiquity: Comforting at a Distance

As my rural, boarding US high school went online in March 2020, I, like so many, was shocked by the sudden "asynchronization" of the teaching and learning experience and

2 Stoic philosophy sharply distinguished between the *proficiens* "one making progress" or *discipulus* "student" and the sage (*sapiens*, wise person), the entirely self-sufficient and wise Stoic philosopher. The wise person was immensely rare—Socrates is generally the only person held to have been a sage—and so the importance of cultivating co-learning (as Seneca recommends in his *Letters*) between *proficientes* at various points of the journey toward self-sufficiency and understanding was vital. Indeed, in Alexander of Aphrodisias's *De Fato*, Alexander says that the Stoics held the wise person to be as rare as a phoenix. (Alexander, *De Fato* 196.24–197.3, Long and Sedley 61N)

3 SEL (Social Emotional Learning) represents a vast and diverse array of approaches and pedagogical/developmental theories. I choose one long-lasting one here—Mayer and Salovey's Four Branch Model of EI (1997)—but there are numerous models and frameworks that can be implemented into classroom practice. A helpful schematization of Mayer and Salovey (and numerous other frameworks), can be found at this webpage of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University: <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/>. For a summary of the Yale Center's RULER skills-method, see <https://www.rulerapproach.org/about/what-is-ruler/>.

the sudden exit of students from our campus. There was grief in this adjustment. My students were angry, confused, frustrated, and scared. Consequently, they reported being distracted and annoyed in most of their classes—“disengaged,” “unstimulated,” “preoccupied,” “depressed,” “anxious,” “panicked.” Even as a teacher with extensive online experience, I was at a loss for how to replicate a formerly in-person class in a new online environment—especially one that was abruptly ended by calamity.

One afternoon during a Zoom meeting, one of my students asked: “How did ancient teachers teach during pandemics?” This question fascinated me. I knew of no specific “learner’s texts” composed, say, during the Antonine Plague, but I immediately thought of the ancient epistolary tradition—the art of writing letters to be widely read—and in particular thought of Seneca’s *Epistulae ad Lucilium* and his *Consolationes* (themselves composed as letters), two texts that served a pedagogical purpose for the philosopher in his interactions with his students, friends, family, and the wider public.<sup>4</sup>

These texts did, in a sense, have a ready-made distance curriculum: contained in them were the essential elements of a Stoic regimen for moral self-improvement and emotional regulation.<sup>5</sup> In this way they do resemble the sort of missives, we, too, now must send out to our students when we write up an asynchronous lesson: we put before our students carefully crafted lessons which are meant to be completed on their own time, at their own pace, and whenever and wherever they can work on them. Seneca so often in the *Letters* points to their inherent educative quality, and takes pains to relay what lessons either he or a friend or Lucilius learned in their progress toward ethical wisdom any particular day.

The educative purpose of the *Letters*—and its built-in pedagogical theory of asynchronous co-learning toward our better selves—is made explicit throughout the text, but in a memorable example, Seneca writes:

*Adsero te mihi; meum opus es. Ego quom vidissem indolem tuam, inie-  
ci manum, exhortatus sum, addidi stimulos nec lente ire passus sum, sed*

4 For more on the ancient art of letter writing, consult Morello and Morrison 2007. For the consolatory genre in particular, Graver 2002 is a helpful summary of the genealogy of the genre after Crantor. For the late antique tradition in consolatory writing, especially in Early Christian authors, see Scourfield 1993, Moreschini 2014, Lerer 1985, Gregg 1975.

5 For more on this practical dimension of Stoic thought (and especially in the thought of Seneca), see Setaioli 2014 and Konstan 2015.

*subinde incitavi; et nunc idem facio, sed iam currentem hortor et invicem hortantem.*

*I claim you for myself; you are my work. When I saw you character, I laid down my hand upon you; I urged you; I applied the spurs and didn't let you go on easily, but kept on you continually. And now I do the same, but now I urge on the runner, who, in turn, urges me on. (Letter 34; my translation)<sup>6</sup>*

Seneca here makes clear that this process of learning—and especially the learning toward emotional regulation in service of the philosophical life—is cooperative, shared undertaking.

The *Consolationes*, in particular, resonated with me as I read them again during the pandemic. It's not just that they resemble distance education lessons in their distinctly pedagogical orientation. They deal with the very subjects which my students (9<sup>th</sup> graders) were asking about: Death, grief, anxiety, disease, how to handle our emotions, and how to endure through calamity and misfortune.

I realized that a unique opportunity had arisen. I decided to incorporate ancient consolatory texts into my 9<sup>th</sup> grade Latin I curriculum as we finished the 2020 school year. I did this through both graded, proficiency-appropriate Latin texts from Senecan originals and through English translation.<sup>7</sup> I used these as an introduction to the Senecan Stoic moral education program—and its direct applicability to the lives of my students as they themselves navigated the tragedy of the Covid-19 pandemic in Spring 2020.

Let's take a look at some of the texts from Seneca's *Letters* and the *Consolationes*. I'll show how I aimed to engage students in active synchronous and asynchronous reflection on these texts as a lead-up to my concluding sections on a sort of 21<sup>st</sup> century *Consolatio*

<sup>6</sup> Also cited in my essay, "Teletherapeia: Ancient Consolation in the Distance Latin Classroom," in *In Medias Res* (5.29.2020): <https://medium.com/in-medias-res/teletherapeia-ancient-consolation-in-the-distance-latin-classroom-d54934e715be>. Translations throughout are all my own, though I did consult Graver and Long 2015. My approach to the *Letters* is inspired by recent work into its performative-educative features—see especially Schafer 2011.

<sup>7</sup> I don't spend much time here on how I adapted Seneca's original Latin (at an ACTFL "distinguished" proficiency reading level) for novice proficiency readers. Consult my article in *In Medias Res* (5.29.2020) for more on that process, especially the section, "Tiered Adaptations": <https://medium.com/in-medias-res/teletherapeia-ancient-consolation-in-the-distance-latin-classroom-d54934e715be>.

for my students through SEL.

### 3. Stoic Consolatio in the Face of Misfortune: How I Taught Seneca to Ninth Graders in the Midst of a Pandemic

Ancient Greek and Roman philosophical schools—especially those in the Hellenistic periods and later—emphasized the power of their teachings to provide, in one way or another, some amount of therapy in the face of misfortune or calamity in this life. They (ostensibly) taught followers of their sect how to control and regulate their emotions, endure difficulty, and to not fear death. Ancient Hellenistic schools—Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics—all similarly claimed to provide their followers with a sort of psychic repose and balance only achievable through their teachings—so-called *ataraxia*, a kind of philosophical bliss and contentment.<sup>8</sup>

Stoic consolation in the face of misfortune centered on one of the core teachings of Stoic philosophy: that virtue *alone* is good. This had an important corollary: that vice *alone* was bad. This meant that many apparent evils—like natural disasters, death, war, disease, and plague—were only “bad” in a qualified sense. The Stoic typically consoled another person on temporary misfortune by an appeal to this *real* sense of good and evil. As long as your character remains intact, you’ve not really suffered an irreparable misfortune.

I presented this to my students through simple, declarative Latin sentences and phrases in a PowerPoint presentation before we read from Seneca in adapted Latin and my translations. Here’s an example in Figure 1:

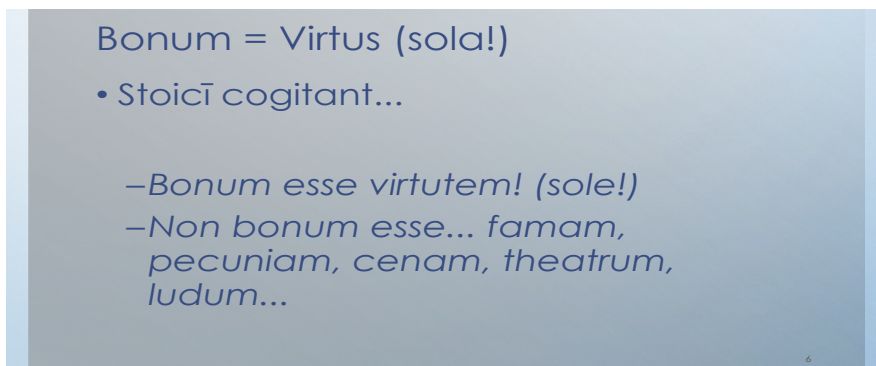


Fig. 1

Emotions (Gr. *pathe*, Lat. *perturbationes animi*, after Cicero), on the prevailing Stoic view, were especially dangerous for the person trying to lead a good life. They often mislead a person into thinking things that were only apparently bad were *really* bad. This led some Stoics to be suspicious of the emotions in general, and gives us our everyday meaning of the word “Stoic” as someone who is steely and calm in the face of trying circumstances.

Grief (*dolor* in Seneca’s Latin) was a typical target of Stoic attention and philosophical consolation, especially when tied to the natural passing of friends and relatives. Not only did it reflect a misunderstanding of what is really bad—we should grieve, for instance, that they were a *bad* person, not that they passed away—but it also inhibited one’s getting on with being a good person by distracting the mind and the senses.

Again, I gave my students a rough approximation of this view in simple, declarative Latin before we moved on to our selections from Seneca. See Figure 2.

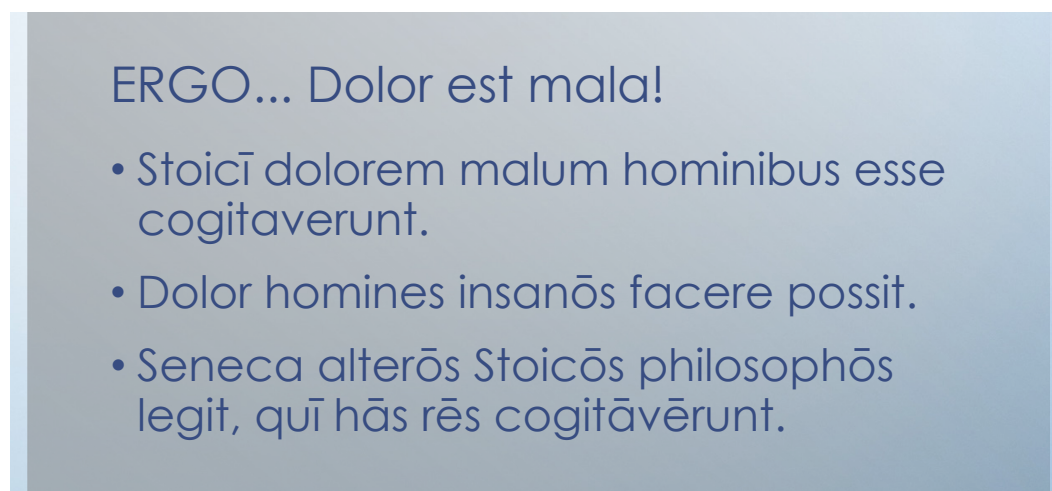


Fig. 2

Despite the prevalence of this type of argument in ancient Stoic circles, a common recent (and ancient) criticism of these arguments is that they are so coldly philosophical so as to be almost inhuman.

Seneca, cognizant of these concerns throughout the *Letters* and *Consolationes*, produces careful, nuanced treatments of the emotions, how they figure into a human life,

and the reasons why the Stoics might encourage us to move on constructively from them. Knowing that some of my students were already reading popular appropriations of the Stoics online which often cleaved to the rigid Stoic view of the emotions (examples abound from a simple Google search), I wanted to introduce them to this more humane approach to Stoic philosophy.

In particular, I wanted to draw from some of Seneca's discussion of *dolor* in the *Consolatio ad Polybium*. In it, Seneca consoles Polybius, a member of the Emperor Claudius's court, on the death of his brother. In this selection, Seneca says that he does not recommend total abstinence from emotions, but rather wants to show Polybius how to give them their proper place in a well-functioning human emotional life:

*Numquam autem ego a te, ne ex toto maereas, exigam. Et scio inveniri quosdam durae magis quam fortis prudentiae viros, qui negent doliturum esse sapientem. Hi non videntur mihi unquam in eiusmodi casum incidisse, alioquin excussisset illis fortuna superbam sapientiam et ad confessionem eos veri etiam invitos compulisset.*

*Satis praestiterit ratio, si id unum ex dolore, quod et superest et abundat, exciderit; ut quidem nullum omnino esse eum patiat, nec sperandum ulli nec concupiscendum est. Hunc potius modum servet, qui nec impietatem imitetur nec insaniam et nos in eo teneat habitu, qui et pia mentis est nec motae. Fluant lacrimae, sed eadem et desinant, trahantur ex imo gemitus pectore, sed idem et finiantur; sic rege animum tuum, ut et sapientibus te adprobare possis et fratribus.*

*But I'll never demand from you that you not grieve at all. I know that there are some people whose wisdom is more harsh than strong, and who think that the wise person should never grieve. These people seem to me to have never suffered mishap like this, as if they had, fortune would have knocked out their proud wisdom and compelled them to admit the truth.*

*It's enough that reason should remove what is excessive and overabundant; it shouldn't be hoped or wished that reason should make it so we don't suffer grief at all. Rather let reason conserve a sort of moderation, which imitates neither impiety nor insanity, and let it hold us in that place*

*that is characteristic of an affectionate (rather than disturbed) mind. Let the tears flow, but also let them stop; let groans be led out from deep in the chest, but also finished; thus control your mind, so that you may get praise from both the wise and your brothers.<sup>9</sup> (Consolatio ad Polybium 18.5–7; my translation)*

It's important to note a few of Seneca's important adaptations of the "hardline" Stoic view (which, it should be noted, wasn't universal among earlier ancient Stoics, either). Seneca strongly recommends *against* bottling up our emotions or pretending not to feel them. He in fact says that those who recommend such a course haven't truly suffered loss or misfortune. Their cold philosophy, he says, will be forced to confess the truth upon meeting true and devastating loss. He clarifies that the purpose of reason is not to "eradicate" emotion but to regulate it.

This position is much more in keeping with contemporary approaches in emotional regulation (both in the behavioral sciences and in SEL pedagogies). It served helpfully in introducing my students to some of the strategies for emotional regulation I'll mention in my next section.

I conjoined our reading this passage with a short Harkness discussion on the value or disvalue of grief in the face of misfortune.<sup>10</sup> I asked students to discuss the following question: "Should we grieve the 2020 school year?" This required students to connect their own experiences as students during the ongoing pandemic with Seneca's reflections as to the purpose served by grief. It also presented students with an excellent opportunity to both share their emotions in a constructive way (in a group discussion among peers), but also gain perspective on those emotions by responding to the contributions of their peers. In this way our Harkness discussion on whether we should "grieve" the 2020 school year became an exercise in emotional co-regulation (again, a theme I'll return to in Part 4).

I'd like now to introduce a few more passages from Seneca I shared with my students and suggest some ways we might engage with them in activities which aid students in processing difficult emotions and emotional regulation.

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The first comes from the first of Seneca's *Letters*. In it, Seneca urges Lucilius to

9 For my graded adaptation of this text, see Dutmer 2020, "Teletherapeia".

10 For more on the student-centered Harkness discussion method, consult this section of the Phillips Exeter Academy website: <https://www.exeter.edu/programs-educators/harkness-outreach>.



use his time wisely and seize every moment.

*Free yourself for yourself, gather and save your time... Persuade yourself that what I write is true: Certain moments are ripped from us, some carried off, some glide away... Therefore, Lucilius, do as you write you are doing: hold on to every hour... While life is put off, it runs by. Nothing is ours, Lucilius; only time is ours. (Letter 1 Translations mine).*

I read this with my students at the end of one of our synchronous Zoom class periods. I then had them reflect on this with one-sentence responses to the following prompts: “What does time feel like right now? Does it feel like life is being put off? How can we make this time *ours*?” I was impressed with the quality and sincerity of the answers I received.

We then began the next class day with a short discussion on what the passing of time felt like during the pandemic. Students talked about how it *did* feel like life was being put off; that they hadn’t really even experienced the year; that it felt like this time had been taken away from them. Some expressed feeling frustrated that this had happened to them; others that they felt their first year in high school had been wasted; others expressed fear that they would never make up the time; others a sense of gratitude of the opportunity to slow down and for their own and their family’s health. All the while students constructively responded to each other, and worked together to think of ways that they could make this time at least somewhat more bearable. In a memorable moment, one of my students mentioned how this could be a good time to start and tend a garden. Another said they wanted help from classmates in choosing a new hobby.

Together, students recognized their emotions, gave them names, talked about how to work through them, and even brainstormed ideas for how to translate some of that energy into other positive, creative, affirming activities.

Next I had students read this passage from Seneca’s second letter, where he recommends to Lucilius that he always “consume” media with an eye toward how it might benefit him as a person (a thoroughly foreign idea to many of my students!):

*So always read the tested authors, and when you want to move on to others, return to the first authors. Every day acquire some help against poverty, something against death, something against other misfortunes, too; and*

*when you have gone through many of these writings, pick one which you'll digest thoroughly that day. I do this, too; from the many things I read, I hold on to something. (Letter 2)*

I paired this with an asynchronous reflection activity. I asked students to do the following:

*Read an article (try Teen Mental Health or Go Ask Alice! at Columbia University) or watch a video on YouTube (especially TED Talks) on dealing with misfortune, bad luck, or loss or working through negative/challenging emotions. What did you learn? What's something you'd like to remember? Write down at least one thing—something that helps you emotionally in the face of misfortune. Keep this in your journal. Next week you'll "return to the tested authors". You'll see whether the advice stands up!*

Then, I had students hold on to this resource as part of their weekly asynchronous portfolios. This gave students a start on a database of helpful resources for them—one that they could build on each week we were together.

One of the recurrent topics in students' emotional self-reports each week was sadness that they couldn't be with their friends and family as we transitioned online. I, too, felt this deeply. I found a selection from Seneca that spoke to this—when he urges Lucilius to adopt a different perspective with respect to their being far away and having to write to each other. It, paradoxically, suggests that the distance between the two of them contributed little to a "distance" between them, but rather brought them closer. Here's the passage:

*But place (locus) contributes little toward tranquillity; it is the mind which must make all things agreeable to itself... Why are you not where you want [to be]? Send your thoughts there... A friend should be held in spirit. This friend is never absent. Everyday he can see whomever he wishes. So, study with me, eat with me, walk with me. I see you, my Lucilius, and I even hear you. I am with you so much that I wonder whether I should begin to write you notes (codicillos), and not letters (epistulas). (Letter 40)*

To reflect on this passage, I asked students to think about a close friend. I then asked them whether they had been closer or more distant with them since the beginning of online learning. As students had returned to different places around the globe, their answers were

not universal. Having a quick share-out on this yielded interesting results. In particular, some students who felt especially wistful for our campus were comforted knowing that some students were now closer to their families than they had been for some time (we have numerous Chinese national students in our campus community). I then asked students to write a note (*codicillus*) to a dear friend (not an *epistula!*) to try to encourage closeness even during social distancing.

As the weeks moved on in my experiment to incorporate not only SEL into my daily interactions with students (whether synchronously or asynchronously), I was touched by the notes that came in from students who remarked that they felt i) that they were being heard and ii) that these daily and weekly reflections on their emotions were helping.

This inspired me to share with them this last passage from Seneca's *Letters*. In it, Seneca remarks on something wonderful: he notices that he's starting to change. This moment—emotional and mental growth—is of course powerful and immensely life-affirming. I wanted to share this moment with my students in the very moment of their own powerful, life-affirming, touching growth in the midst of one of the most challenging moments they'll ever face:

*I think, Lucilius, I'm not only being improved, but that I'm being transformed. But I don't promise or even hope that there's nothing left in me that needs to be changed. I have many things which ought to be compacted, thinned out, or accentuated. And this itself is evidence that my soul has been transformed into something better, because it sees vices that it didn't know about previously. (Letter 6)*

These readings and activities grow out of a deep commitment I have to attending to my students not just as learners of the “content” of Classics—that I teach them Latin or about the peoples and cultures of the Ancient Mediterranean—but out of a deep, abiding concern for their growth as flourishing, emotionally healthy people. This I have in common with Seneca. In Letter 39, he warns Lucilius against “cramming” the teachings of philosophers through compendia without having applied those teachings to his own life. Seneca knew that learning takes place in an individual, and that emotional health is vital to whether any lesson is internalized.

These concerns I share too with the numerous educators and researchers working

in Social Emotional Learning. In the next section, I'll provide more of the contemporary theoretical basis and inspiration for my discussion of Seneca and the consolatory genre this spring.

#### **4. Consolatio for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Student: Social Emotional Learning in the Classics Classroom**

Social Emotional Learning (or SEL) represents a broad, diverse array of non-academic or non-content skills, knowledge, and behaviors that individuals must acquire to be successful, engaged, flourishing members of society. Consequently, the term has had a broad (and at times confusing) application. According to the Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory at Harvard University, SEL has its genesis and continued application in a number of closely related 21<sup>st</sup> century learning initiatives:

*Social and emotional learning (SEL) has often been used as an umbrella term to represent a wide array of non-academic skills that individuals need in order to set goals, manage behavior, build relationships, and process and remember information. These skills and competencies develop across our lives and are essential to success in school, work, home, and community...*

*In some respects, the term SEL serves as an umbrella for many subfields with which many educators, researchers, and policy-makers are familiar (e.g., bullying prevention, civic and character education and development, conflict resolution, social skills training, life skills, "soft" or "non-cognitive" skills, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills)<sup>11</sup>*

Despite difficulties in defining the bounds of SEL, there is widespread agreement among educators, researchers, policy-makers, and parents that inculcation of these skills is a vital function of the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational program.<sup>12</sup>

As I noted in my introduction, the Covid-19 crisis will in all likelihood put student, teacher, administrator, and parent stress at all-time highs. The need for SEL—and its focus on Emotional Intelligence and a healthy regulation of emotion—will, consequently,

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11 Explore SEL 2020, <http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/about/>.

12 Chang 2006 provides a helpful sampling of some of the critical literature in support of SEL and the teaching of Emotional Intelligence in schools in her Introduction.

become even more critical for educators and the populations they serve.<sup>13</sup>

Further, SEL, I contend, serves many of the same functions that Seneca's *Letters* or *Consolations* do. It identifies common, shared emotions that cause us distress; it gives us an explanation as to why we might feel those things (whether the explanation is reasonable or unreasonable); it gives us a name for those emotions—for example, *dolor* or “grief”; it helps us express them in a way that is socially constructive; and, ultimately, gives us a framework for regulating and processing those emotions in a way that amplifies their positive attributes while dampening their negative consequences. In short, it does the very things that I noted above in Seneca's description of “grief with reason” in the *Consolatio ad Polybium*.

In structuring my reflections and activities with students on Stoic and Epicurean consolatory writing, I adapted the RULER Method as developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.<sup>14</sup> This method can be implemented schoolwide with the right institutional backing—I simply implemented it individually on an exploratory, experimental basis. The RULER Method provides a helpful, skill-based framework for thinking about how to implement Emotional Intelligence-informed teaching in the classroom with this helpful mnemonic:

RULER is:

Recognizing emotions in oneself and others

Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions

Labeling emotions with a nuanced vocabulary

Expressing emotions in accordance with cultural norms and social context

Regulating emotions with helpful strategies<sup>15</sup>

I used RULER to help give order to my activities in Section 3 a consistent form. Every activity didn't need each of the elements of RULER, but I was surprised at how many activities that required students, in one way or another, to reflect on their emotions (whether in writing or in speaking) and say something about them to their peers practiced all of the

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13 Brackett and Cipriano 2020

14 RULER builds on the Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence popularized in Mayer and Salovey 1997.

15 To learn more about the RULER approach, consult the official website at <https://www.rulerapproach.org/about/what-is-ruler/>. It should be noted that I have only applied this approach on a singular, ad hoc basis. My institution is not a RULER-affiliated school. Hence, we have not instituted the “RULER Tools” schoolwide.

skills contained in RULER. In fact, students were enthusiastic in offering constructive, helpful advice to each other, building on the second “R”—“Regulating emotions with helpful strategies.”

RULER (and other SEL pedagogical frameworks, besides) can of course be implemented *without* choosing texts and readings that have a specific “consolatory” dimension.

However, I was impressed by the positive reception such a pairing of pedagogical activities and practices derived from the RULER method and the texts from Seneca received. Students remarked in their reflections that studying ancient consolation and thinking, reflecting, sharing, and discussing explicitly and directly their emotions made them feel that the class was one of the most supportive and encouraging environments they had in the transition to online teaching. Students at the end of term wanted to discuss who felt Stoicism was more consoling and who felt Epicureanism was more consoling. I had numerous students remark that their Latin class made them feel “heard”, “supported”, and “seen as people”. Similarly, students said that I and the class were “helpful,” “encouraging,” “nurturing,” “open,” “exciting,” “energizing,” “respectful,” and “inclusive.” Recall that when I first began compiling responses from my students, they said that they felt “unstimulated,” “depressed,” and “anxious.” Students specifically noted that journaling about their emotions, openly talking about the situation we found ourselves in, and connecting as peers and with an adult helped them process these powerful feelings.

In sum, SEL helped both to amplify my use of consolatory texts from antiquity *and* to serve as consolatory pedagogical practice itself. Students in my classes were engaging in emotional regulation and processing both in form (as SEL practices were intentionally incorporated into my daily and weekly teaching practice) and content (as we explored the ancient consolatory genre together).

## 5. Conclusion

In this essay, I advanced a twofold thesis. I argued that due to the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic and the incredible stress this places on educators and the communities they serve, classics educators should i) draw classical texts that serve to help students in their processing difficult, trying emotions attendant with the period and ii) inform this incorporation of (specifically) the consolatory genre with a pedagogy

informed by contemporary SEL and its focus on healthy emotional regulation as central to an individual's well-being and flourishing.

As classics instructors, we have a wealth of texts from which to draw to meet this dual purpose. Seneca, in particular, I've hoped to show, is a powerful author for high school consumption, though I'd contend there are many others.

We and our students will continue to face this, together. SEL shows a way forward for classics that is responsive, inclusive, cooperative, and restorative.

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