

Embedding Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) into Course Content

What is social-emotional learning (SEL)?

“SEL is the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably.”¹

OR

Helping students become confident, positive, and happy with themselves and other people.

WHY is SEL important?

Every second you are in the classroom in front of students, you are building a relationship with each of them. It is either positive or negative. Ensure your body language, approach to student work and questions, and overall community is an inviting, safe, and equitable place to be.

How can I bring SEL to my classroom?

You can adapt the following resources to bring Social and Emotional Learning into your classroom without sacrificing content-learning time, whether you are working on math, art, history, English, foreign language, or science.

The reason to connect SEL with academic learning is twofold. First, as an instructor you want your lessons to be valuable on multiple levels every day. Second, as Common Core Standards, increased emphasis on testing, and a high-stakes environment permeate the education field, we often cannot afford to take moments away from content learning, in our eyes or our administrators' eyes.

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¹ Zins, Joseph. Maurice Elias. “Social and Emotional Learning,” Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/elias_zins.pdf Accessed: April 15th, 2012

Meeting Your Kids: Student-Driven Team Building

Name Game:

Set-Up Directions: This game is only effective when used in the first week of school. You will need a soft nerf-type ball to play this game, and may choose to arrange students in a circle or in rows. As many people have played before, you will ask the first student to begin the circle by saying his or her name and passing the ball. The second must then repeat the first student's name and say his or her own. The third repeats the two names before and so on. The object is that by the time all students repeat their names through the whole cycle, the teacher must be able to say each student's name (in order) as well. If the teacher can, he or she wins. If the teacher misses one, he or she must bring a fun treat or prize for all students. (Often teachers choose to 'miss' one name if students participated well, so that they can be rewarded for their positive social interaction and effort to get to know classmates.

Alterations: You can also ask students to add a themed noun-word to their name for extra memory triggers, like 'Laura Lion,' or 'Sarah Squirrel.'

Rationale: This shows students that their identity is important, since everyone in class is required to know. You can also emphasize the importance of pronunciation here, since students often have pronunciation preferences that are ignored or never told to teachers out of habit of being called something else. Also, it is a great helper to learn every single kid's name by the third or fourth day, which aids in positive and effective classroom management.

Silent Grouping:

Set-Up Directions: Simply tell all students in a class that they must form groups of no more than 5 based on something common between those people *without talking at all*. It is up to students to get creative with hand gestures, writing notes, and signaling in different ways.

Debriefing Silent Grouping: After groups have been formed, each group explains what the common feature is that binds them together. This can range from birth dates to number of siblings to gang affiliations.

Rationale: The more creative the group formation, the more insight students are able to gain about how they relate to others in the classroom. It also fosters creative collaborative problem solving, and positive interaction toward a common goal.

Hand-Catch:

Set-Up Directions: Students form a standing circle in the room. Each student should open the palm of their left hand, and place it flat facing upward to their left side. Next, they should point their index finger of their right hand, and poise that directly over the flattened palm of the person on their right. At this point, each student should have a their right finger pointing toward someone's palm, and their left hand flat beneath another's pointed finger.

Playing the Game: One person remains in the middle and designates a special word the students in the circle listen for. The center person talks or tells a story and introduces the word every so often. When they hear to special word, students simultaneously try to grab their partner's finger with their flat left palm while yanking their right pointed hand out of danger.

Rationale: This game involves course content because it can be used with any type of vocabulary learning or review for any subject area. Students must listen carefully to hear the word (or phrase) used correctly, which sharpens their knowledge as they laugh and try to escape from the hand-catch. Additionally, since students try to catch one another and rotate through the middle, it can be entirely student-driven, helping each child to work with others in the room in a positive way and toward a common goal – to keep the game running by the rules and to help classmates learn.

Teaching People, Not Just Subjects: Where I'm From Poem

Origin: This assignment is very popular and was developed by the female American poet, George Ella Lyon. Her work has been used with kindergarteners, prisoners, professional writers, and students across the world. Her work can easily be adapted to your needs, and you may have even written one of these poems before. If so, do not underestimate the power of this assignment – the reason this assignment's popularity endures is that individuals take it in different directions creatively every single time.

- Be sure to get all students in a large circle to share their poems with the class, and tell them they will be sharing when you give the assignment.
- Find George Ella Lyon's website for this poem, and her original, here:
<http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>
- An example assignment sheet is below:

Where Are You From? Writing Ourselves in Poetry

Name: _____

Assignment: Write a poem to share with the class that reflects on your roots, and considers your family history, your culture, your childhood memories, and how your roots have made you who you are today. Be sure to deeply consider images, objects, and 'showing' descriptions to tell us who you are.

- A) ____ You may choose to use the format below
 B) ____ You may make up your own format for the poem relying on imagery and 'showing' descriptions.
- *All poems must be read aloud to the class. They must be school appropriate, and you feel comfortable sharing.*
 - *All poems must be typed neatly to hand in for full credit.*

Template:

I am from _____ (*specific ordinary item*), from _____ (*product name*) and _____.²

I am from the _____ (*home description... adjective, adjective, sensory detail*).

I am from the _____ (*plant, flower, natural item*), the _____ (*unnatural item, man-made*)

I am from _____ (*family tradition*) and _____ (*family trait*), from _____ (*name of family member*) and _____ (*another family name*) and _____ (*family name*).

I am from the _____ (*description of family tendency*) and _____ (*another one*).

From _____ (*something you were told as a child*) and _____ (*another*).

I am from (*representation of religion, or lack of it*). Further description.

I'm from _____ (*place of birth and family ancestry*), _____ (*two food items representing your family*).

From the _____ (*specific family story about a specific person and detail*), the _____ (*another detail*), and the _____ (*another detail about another family member*).

I am from _____ (*location of family pictures, mementos, archives and several more lines indicating their worth*).

² Lyon, George Ella. Template copied from: <http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html>

Teaching People, Not Just Subjects: Daily Techniques

Project Post-Its:

Directions: Grab two packs of post-its in different colors, and give one of each color to students as they prepare to submit a large project, paper, or assignment. Ask students to reflect in thought about what they feel they did best on the assignment, and what they would like the most help/feedback on (what they are least confident about). Have them describe their project's best attribute on one post-it and affix it. On the other have them describe what they want the most feedback on and why, and affix that. Then submit.

Grading: Read and pay special attention to the student's reflection on his or her own work. Asking them to do this requires the kids to take responsibility for their work, and allows you to give more specific and targeted feedback.

Rationale: Project Post-Its bring conversation between instructor and students into grading coursework. This assignment asks students to take a stake in their own learning, by asking for help for future assignments and reflecting on their produced work. It also allows you as the instructor to see inside the student's perspective – if they say they would still like more help on a certain topic you've taught, you can understand they are seeking help and not slacking off or spacing out.

Responding to Student Grading:

Directions: At the end of a test, paper, project rubric, or free-write, write a small 'letter' to the student about his or her performance. You MUST begin with the student's name. Ex: "Jasmine, you have really done a great job and I think you could work to improve" Be sure to give positive feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Rationale: This again brings conversation to coursework, not just a letter grade on product the student produces. Also, by pointing out strengths and areas for future improvement, you are not just deducting for the current assignment – you are encouraging the learning of students as people in the future.

Pit Stops:

Set-Up Directions: Students enter class and prepare to take note for a lecture. They also answer a series of questions on the board about themselves and their days, and keep it on the edge of their desk that day in case they are asked to share out. Questions should start with "something that made you smile today," and "something that made you frown today," and can expand from there in any direction of your choice.

Using Pit Stops: The teacher should assign one student to keep a stopwatch on his or her desk and signal the teacher every time it reaches 5 or 6 minutes. (For differentiation purposes, it is often best to select a student who struggles to focus or stay on task to be timer since this job requires practicing focus in a positive, leadership-based way.) Every time the 'timer' signals the teacher, the teacher pauses lecture and randomly selects a student in class to share out from their pit-stop list, and others can respond or comment briefly. After this point, students return to lecture notes and practice refocusing between activities.

Rationale: Pit Stops are a great lecture-breaker. They keep students engaged and on their toes during important but sometimes dry class periods, since every four minutes is studded by a share-out from a class member. While students will often share out funny or silly pit stops, they will also sometimes take a moment to share on a deeper level with the class and teacher about big events, concerns, or joys in their lives, which helps bind everyone together in a small way during drier content days.

Asking for Content-to-Self Connections:

Definition: In English, we know this as text-to-self. But connecting curriculum to our own lives is important in every single content area, and is something teachers often do naturally. Modeling this type of thinking often begins with phrases like:

- What I just read reminds me of the time when I...
- I agree with/understand what I just read because in my own life...
- I don't agree with what I just read because in my own life...

Explanation and Examples: Design curriculum, assignments, and class discussion or group work so that students must connect material to their own lives and experiences. Starter example ideas are below:

- English: Informal essay asking students to compare their own lives to a character in the book.
- History: Imagine you are a historical figure – how would you feel and act in their situation?
- Math: Research how to apply math practices to daily life, or record every time you use numbers in a given day.
- Science: How does physiology of the body relate to sports you practice and play after school?
- Visual & Performing Art: represent an experience, emotion, or feeling through an art piece

Rationale: Self-connections are proven to move knowledge more effectively to long-term memory storage, and will also help kids see how curriculum matters to their circumstances and lives, as well as how it relates to other students in the classroom. Additionally, you can learn more about your students' interest, dreams, and daily lives from what they choose to share with the class, creating a deeper relationship and community in your room.

Active Station Learning: Self-Determination and Collaboration

1. What is Station Learning?

Students work in small groups arranged throughout the classroom. Each group completes a *different* task in a limited amount of time (ranging from 7 minutes to a more than a class period).

- Group members must work together to manage their time, learn the station's content, and complete a mini-assessment or task.
- The instructor circulates at this time and observes, clarifies, and minimally assists students as needed.

To teach station lessons effectively the instructor must complete a large amount of preparation, be incredibly organized, and keep close track of time during the lesson. The rewards are worth it though! During the lesson, the instructor is free to circulate and troubleshoot, and students must:

- *Sharpen self-determination skills* because they are in charge of time management and task completion in a short period of time.
- *Improve collaboration skills* since the whole group must work together to complete a station.
- *Develop independent learning ability*, since student voice and ideas are emphasized as most important in this type of setting.

The overall format of station learning is incredibly supportive of Social and Emotional Learning, while the content can be developed and adapted per lesson, per subject, and per student ability.

2. Two Types of Station Learning:

- ❖ **Static Stations:** Students remain at the same station for the entire lesson. Their assessment is to learn the material at that station and prepare to debrief or teach it to this class. These stations are often more complicated or in depth than transitional.
 - Debrief could be a short, jig-saw style share out where other classmates.
 - Teaching the station could be a full scale, formal presentation. The choice is yours.
- ❖ **Transitional Stations:** Student rotate through a series of stations throughout the class period (between 3-4 usually works best), and spend around 10 minutes at each one, completing a short task by the time they rotate.
 - The task could be a performance, demonstration, or worksheet section.
 - It is usually shorter and less complicated than static stations.

3. Station Learning Template: What to Plan

Use this starter checklist to plan your station lessons. Expand, change, and alter it based on your own creativity, your kids' needs, and your lesson's objectives.

- **Static or Transitional?** Based on descriptions in Part 2, which type of station BEST fits your content learning objectives and the SEL needs of your students. (Hint: it's often easier to start with static stations!)

- **Grouping:** Have groups planned before students get to class. How will you group students? Randomly? By interest of station topic? By differentiating for special needs? By people they have infrequently worked with? Consider your objectives, and decide how to best meet the needs of *your* kids for that lesson.

- **Classroom Set-Up:** How much room do kids need to complete activities? How many students will be at each station at a given time? Do they need to be taught in a specific order? How can you arrange them to student transition through them in most clear? *Create a class layout/ seating chart for your own use during the lesson.*

- **Signs:** Do you need to create numbers for the stations, so you may simply reference them during the lesson? Should each one have a list of group member names?

- **Document and Response Packets:** Each station needs
 - *Directions:* Be sure to include a time limit and requirements for completion
 - *Documents:* These could be models, videos, news articles, or photographs. They are what students will examine, learn from, and use to demonstrate knowledge.
 - *Response Packet:* This often travels with a group (transitional) or stays at one station (static), and is where students can record their tasks from each station. You can collect this at the end of the period for
 - *Optional Timer:* If your students need reminders keeping track of time

4. Station Learning Lesson: How to Teach the Class

Directions below are a starter checklist to ensure the actual class period runs smoothly. They must be tweaked to fit your specific lesson, but include most major needs. (If students will take the whole period in a static station and will debrief the next day, be sure to collect their response packets or lesson notes in case of an unexpected group-member absence.)

Before Students Arrive: Using your class layout/ seating chart, arrange the desks before students arrive, and set out station numbers, document packets, and names of group members at each station. Ensure you have a master copy of every resource in the room for reference. Set up timer and ensure that it works and is visible. Write directions for finding seats on the board (look for names on group lists, etc).

2 Minutes - Objective: Tell students what the purpose is (including SEL goals), and what they need to know by the end of the day. If you're running transitional stations, you may want to give a 10 word 'preview' of each station's topic

5 Minutes - Directions: Tell them time for each station and show them the timer, explain tasks and requirements, demonstrate how rotations work, explain how they can get help, ask them to repeat directions. Include any other info important to your specific lesson.

Your Choice - During Each Station: Quickly circulate to each group once to ensure they understand directions. Then circulate to groups that may need more support or show larger confusion. Ensure students problem-solve together.

5-7 Minutes - Closing: Draw attention of class, make final announcements (homework reminders), collect packets, ask students to reassemble the room. Leave pad-time of at least a minute for 'deep-breath' relaxing, since stations are often high-energy days.

Want more clarification on station learning??

If you would like an example of what documents, student packets, or layouts look like, please email svarland89@gmail.com with "Station Learning Example Request" in the subject line. Sarah Varland will send you examples of either a static or transitional lesson I've used in my classroom.