

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Guidebook:

Ideas for Incorporating SEL Activities into your Classroom

Prepared for Diablo Valley College Faculty

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*“Educating the mind without educating the heart
is no education at all” – Aristotle*

Introduction

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the educational process that helps students develop skills to understand and manage their emotions, resolve conflicts, maintain healthy relationships, make responsible decisions, and effectively deal with life challenges. SEL develops “emotional intelligence,” which has been demonstrated to have a greater impact on life success than IQ (Goleman).

While emotions might seem to be outside the realm of academic learning, a focus on SEL in the classroom provides many pay offs. Research has repeatedly shown that SEL is critical for success and well-being in life. People with social and emotional competence are more likely to:

- Have a sense of well-being in their personal lives
- Act as contributors to their communities
- Have meaningful relationships
- Feel happiness in their work lives
- Feel more optimistic about their future, and
- Demonstrate compassion for others (Casel)

The positive impact of SEL on academics has also been well documented. Student performance improves when social and emotional development is fostered by instructors and institutions. A 2010 study by Stanford Professor Gregory Walton and University of Texas at Austin Professor David Yeager found that a relatively little amount of social and emotional learning can produce large results.

“Recent randomized experiments have found that seemingly “small” social-psychological interventions in education — that is, brief exercises that target students’ thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in and about school — can lead to large gains in student achievement and sharply reduce achievement gaps even months and years later. These interventions do not teach students academic content but instead target students’ psychology, such as their beliefs that they have the potential to improve their intelligence or that they belong and are valued in school” (267).

Recent research continues to support the conclusion that SEL curricula improves academic outcomes. A Collaboration for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) study of more than 700 programs found that if an institution implements a quality SEL curriculum, they can expect better student behavior and an 11% increase in test scores (Ray).

CASEL identifies five key “competencies” that are seen as instrumental in developing positive relationships and managing life stressors: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These competencies can broadly be grouped into skills pertaining to understanding and managing the self and skills related to understanding and relating to others.

This guidebook seeks to share strategies to incorporate SEL into the college classroom, offering general practices as well as specific instructional interventions. Strategies are divided into two groups aligned with SEL competency areas: 1) self-awareness/management skills and 2) social awareness/relationship skills. The guidebook closes with resources for those who would like to learn more about SEL. I hope you find the guidebook useful and that you find many ways of incorporating SEL into your classroom.

General approaches and practices to facilitate social and emotional learning in your classroom:

- Create a warm, safe and supportive learning environment.
- Develop positive relationships with students. Demonstrate care, concern and a belief in their ability to succeed.
- Allow opportunities for self-reflection and self-evaluation.
- Create opportunities for cooperative learning, relationship-building and communication.
- Attempt to establish an interactive dialogue in class rather than a one-way lecture.
- Incorporate student interests, experiences, and cultural heritage into the curriculum.
- Work to foster a growth mindset in students (students with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can be developed, as opposed to those with a “fixed” mindset who believe that people are born with a certain amount of intelligence and ability).
- Set high academic standards and communicate them clearly to students.
- Give students choice when possible to increase motivation and instill a sense of ownership over the learning process.
- Adapt teaching methods to address different learning styles.
- Consider assessment to be feedback for the instructor as well as the student. Implement ongoing assessment and adapt instruction as necessary in response to students’ needs.
- Develop a balance between lecture and active learning, as well as between individual and collaborative learning.
- Look for ways to add emotional richness to class content. Students learn and remember best when their emotions are engaged.
- Continually develop your own emotional intelligence. Practice and model it in your classroom.

Specific exercises and interventions to incorporate SEL into the classroom:

Self-awareness

- Write the day’s agenda on the board. Students feel safer when knowing what to expect.
- At the beginning of the semester, have each student share a “one-minute autobiography” describing themselves and their life experience.
- Ask students about their previous experience with your subject, and solicit ideas about how they best learn.
- Begin class with a couple minutes of mindfulness to calm emotions and focus attention.
- Engage students in both cognitive and affective inquiry- in addition to asking them what they think about something they are learning, ask how they feel about it.
- When studying characters (either fictional or historical), ask students to identify how the characters might have felt or be feeling.
- Conduct quick class “check-ins”, asking students to reflect on their internal state. Check-ins give instructors a sense of how students are doing and also send the message to students that their emotions matter. Examples of check-ins: raise your hand low to high to show your level of confidence or confusion with this material; stand and silently dance the way you are feeling at this moment; name an animal that represents your mood; use a nature metaphor (river,

meadow, etc.) to capture your current mood; report your stress level on a scale of 1 – 10; describe how you are feeling in one word; name a song lyric that expresses your current mood.

- Pay attention and notice differences in the demeanor and behavior of your students. In individual interactions, reflect back to them what you are seeing and inquire about their attitudes and emotions.
- Ask students to relate the material discussed in class to their life and personal interests. Have students discuss this in small or large groups, or assign writing on the topic. Students will be more engaged and attentive if they identify personal meaning in the curriculum and studies suggest their grades will improve significantly. (Godes, et al, 2007).
- Get to know students' cultures and interests, using questionnaires or informal discussion, and integrate the curriculum with material that is relevant to their lives.
- During test-preparation, schedule time to discuss emotions related to the test. Help normalize stress and fear associated with test-taking.
- Assign a "core values" exercise in which students write about things that matter most to them. Studies have shown value-affirmation exercises to increase student success and reduce the achievement gap (Cohen, et al, 2009).
- If you are teaching a class with many new college students, normalize feeling unconnected at first but explain that social connections in college develop over time. Consider assigning students to write a letter about their transition to college to be shared with new students in a future semester.
- Teach new students that poor academic performance is common upon transition to college and does not reflect a lack of ability or potential. Reassure students that grades typically improve as they adjust to the new educational environment. You may share your own academic struggles or those of past students in your class (without naming names!). Experiments show students given this understanding earn higher GPAs and are less likely to drop out of college. (Wilson, et al, 2002).
- Engage students in goal setting. Ask them to imagine their desired future selves, establish goals to reach this self and identify obstacles that might stand in their way.
- Help students find their purpose in college by asking them to write about how they wish the world could be a better place and how doing well in school can help them make a positive impact on the world.
- Explain the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Ask student to identify an intrinsic motivator for succeeding in your class.
- Ask students to think of someone who would be proud of them for succeeding in your class and have them write that person's name on their syllabus.
- Allow time for journaling and reflecting, or encourage/assign it outside of class.
- Incorporate calming music as a background to learning activities.

Self-management

- Develop class "rules" together- invite students to brainstorm what they need to be successful. Gather ideas into a class contract and have students sign the contract to confirm their commitment. Refer to the contract throughout semester and allow students to reflect on their performance and progress.

- Include an academic planner as one of your required course materials. When reviewing the syllabus, ask students to write due dates and exams in their planners and also encourage them to schedule study time. Refer to the planner throughout the course to encourage students' use of this self-management tool (e.g. "look at your planner and tell me what is due next Tuesday"). Also consider encouraging students to schedule in weekly stress-management activities.
- Encourage students to utilize support services throughout the semester including office hours, tutoring and counseling. Explore and debunk common barriers to asking for help including the perception that it makes the student look "stupid" or that the student would be bothering the instructor.
- When discussing grades with students, help them distinguish between facts (I got a C on that paper) versus self-evaluations (I'm an awful writer) and inferences (my instructor hates me).
- Provide a few minutes at the end of class for students to get started on their homework. Getting started is often the hardest part about getting it done.
- Use growth mindset oriented language when giving feedback to students (e.g. "you clearly worked really hard on that" instead of "you did a great job").
- Engage students in researching and teaching others about growth mindset. Ask students to research and give a one to two-minute group or individual presentation on growth mindset and why it matters.
- Teach students about learning and the brain. Explain to them that they can become more intelligent and capable through study and practice. Provide them a hand-out (example below) on how the brain learns and ask them to come up with a plan to maximize their learning in your class: http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el200912_willis.pdf
- Assign students to read "Myth of I'm Bad at Math" and discuss the myth of limited potential: <https://teacherwise.wordpress.com/2014/10/14/the-myth-of-im-bad-at-math/>
- Discuss with students how mindsets impact learning. Consider showing the 10 minute Ted Talk "The Power of Belief: Mindset and Success" to explain how our understanding of intelligence and abilities impacts our success: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN34FNbOKXc>
- Ask students to make a list of things they consider themselves good at and things that don't come easily to them (you could focus on class content, or more broadly on anything in students' lives and experience). Have students identify reasons they might be "good" or "bad" at each item on their list, and ask them to share these insights with a partner. Finally, have students pick two items on the "not good" list and discuss what it would take for them to improve in that area.
- Show students the 9 minute YouTube video "Will Smith: Mindset Wisdom" in which Smith describes his fierce work ethic and dedication to improvement through practice: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkziAM_ZyDM. Ask students to recall a time when they worked very hard to achieve something, reflecting on what made them work so hard, if they ever felt like giving up, what kept them going, and how they felt when it was done. Divide students into small groups to share their reflections.
- At the beginning of the semester, ask students to anticipate what obstacles to success they might encounter in your class. Have them create a plan to overcome the obstacles.
- Ask students to make a short-term improvement plan. Have them identify a goal (could be class content or life related) and create a seven-day plan for how and when they'll work at it. Ask

them to keep a daily journal on how it's going and, when the week has ended, have them reflect on their progress with their classmates.

- Have students brainstorm and identify their three greatest character strengths. Ask them to imagine and share in pairs how those strengths will help them succeed in your class. Encourage them to note those strengths on their syllabus or record them in their phone to recall during a challenging time.
- Invite successful former students back to your class to talk about the challenges they faced and how they successfully overcame them
- Near the end of the semester, ask students to write a letter to students who will take the class in the next semester. Ask them to share how they struggled and grew during the class and what strategies they used to be successful.
- Normalize mistakes and teach students that they are valuable learning opportunities. Consider showing students the 15 minute YouTube video “Why You Need to Fail”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhxcFGuKOys>
- Ask students to reflect on a time they made a big mistake. Have them write and/or share why they made the mistake, how they felt, what they could have done differently and what they learned from making the mistake.
- Assign students to interview people in their lives about mistakes they made and what they learned from them. Have them collect these stories and share them with classmates.
- Teach students the philosophy of “failing up”, and that mistakes and set-backs can be used as learning opportunities to propel them forward.
- To help students focus on the big picture, ask them to suggest exam questions and review the questions together. You may even select some of the suggestions for the exam and award points to those who suggested them.
- Explore students’ emotions about an upcoming test and help them identify the thoughts that might be generating a negative emotion (e.g. “if I fail this test, I’ll never transfer”). Help them reframe their thinking about the test (e.g. “This is one measure of my knowledge. It will not determine my entire academic future.”) to see if they can change their negative emotions.
- Discuss and allow time to practice strategies for reducing test anxiety including visualization, progressive relaxation, and breathing exercises. For more ideas:
<http://ccit.dtcc.edu/students/testanxiety>
- Have students write down their fears related to exams or other aspects of the class. Once their list is complete, ask them to rip up and recycle their list.
- When conducting a quiz or exam review, share your “favorite wrong answer” to encourage effort and de-stigmatize mistakes. Without naming the student, share what you appreciate in the answer and have students identify what was done right before pointing out the error.
- Ask students to conduct self-assessments on their class performance, identifying strategies and behaviors that are working well for them and anything that needs to be changed or improved. Self-assessment could be built in to the testing process, with a reflective assignment following return of exams and quizzes.
- Conduct some “emotional coaching” after an exam. Remind students that the pursuit of knowledge is hard work and can be painful at times. Encourage them to make learning their goal rather than earning a specific grade. Reassure them that your critical feedback is a sign of your high academic standards and your belief in their potential to reach those standards.

- Set up opportunities for “productive struggle”, allowing students time to work on a problem independently or in small groups before bringing the topic to a lecture or larger discussion.
- Demonstrate your own continual learning and development. Ask students for feedback on the effectiveness of your teaching practices and look for ways to incorporate feedback and make improvements.
- For subjects in which students look for solutions to problems, ask students to come up with multiple ways to find the solution. Facilitate discussion on the different approaches and ask students to identify and explain what worked best.

Social Awareness/Relationship Skills

- Demonstrate warmth and support for students by following up with their concerns, asking questions about their experience, and helping them feel included in class.
- Recognize students’ worth and value and reflect it back to them with feedback and appreciation.
- Try to arrive a few minutes early to welcome students as they arrive, and stay a few minutes after class to follow up with students of concern.
- Be willing to engage with students if you see them outside of class.
- Get to know students’ academic goals, ask them to reflect on how the class is connected to those goals.
- Incorporate team-building activities at the beginning of the semester. Human Bingo is a great “get to know you” activity to use early in the semester. Create a card with information related to your students (e.g. “born in another country” or “plays an instrument”) and have them find people who match each category. Students try to complete the card, filling in the names of students who fit in each category.
- Have students do paired introductions at the beginning of the semester. Ask them to connect with someone they don’t know and give them 3-5 questions to ask (name, major, life goal, hero or role model, etc.) Students interview each other and then introduce their partner to the rest of the class.
- Facilitate group discussions- ask open-ended questions, allow discussion to be student-driven, help students understand how to listen and how to elaborate. Consider configuring students’ desk in a circle for these discussions.
- Ask frequent questions to continually engage students in what they are learning. Have students teach back a concept covered or specific steps to a problem. Rather than waiting for students to raise their hands, try to include the entire class and call on students randomly.
- If conducting a lecture, break the lecture into smaller chunks and incorporate activities and discussions in between lecture presentation.
- Assign and facilitate collaborative learning projects in which students rely on each other to succeed. During the project, have students monitor their own progress and develop their own rubric for evaluation. Allow time for students to reflect on how they worked together and give feedback on what you observed.
- Acknowledge racism, sexism and other bias as it exists in your subject area and allow students to share their reactions.
- Evaluate your relationships with individual students in your class. Choose a couple students each week and try to strengthen your relationship by connecting with them individually for feedback, follow up and support.

- When referring students to campus services, provide a personal reference and consider walking them to the service to help them make the connection.
- Consider mandating campus relationship-building behavior by including attending office hours, utilizing tutoring services and visiting the library or Counseling Center in class requirements.
- Create opportunities for peer tutoring in class.
- Incorporate service learning activities to create meaning in the curriculum.

Additional SEL resources for educators:

Web-based resources

- Article on helping students cultivate hope: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_help_students_develop_hope
- Article on “Using Emotional Intelligence to Teach”: <https://www.higheredjobs.com/Articles/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=285>
- Emotional intelligence assessment for teachers: <https://www.edutopia.org/louisville-social-emotional-learning-quiz>
- Article on productive struggle: <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/harnessing-power-of-productive-struggle-ellie-cowen>
- Wonderful website with mindset information and activities: <https://www.mindsetkit.org/>
- Free, online growth mindset interventions for college students, developed by Stanford University: <https://www.perts.net/orientation/cg17>
- More resources in developing resilience, grit, and growth mindset: <https://www.edutopia.org/resilience-grit-resources>
- Growth mindset lesson plan: https://storage.googleapis.com/mindsetkit-upload/User_kjCekZJc/L2FwcGhvc3RpbmdfcHJvZC9ibG9icy9BRW5CMIVxT2FtTkRaTFNLR1VJZXImbm9TNEliTWY5NmRUN3duYk3RTlnQm15QVlfaGhIcSmpqalhwb29OTzRSktoRHZUTmVnamt1dGYxN2dnTVA4MUZwLUhXYWVlaTRUQS5ZbHJMaVNMS2k0T19NRUZp
- Articles on adjusting teaching style to students’ learning styles: <http://teachersnetwork.org/ntol/howto/adjust/index.htm>
- Math exercises with more than one right answer. “Open tasks” help develop growth mindsets by focusing on the learning process rather than the answer: <https://www.youcubed.org/tasks/>
- Poster on positive norms to encourage in math: <https://www.youcubed.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Norms-Poster-2015.pdf>
- Mathematical Mindsets card: <https://bhi61nm2cr3mkgk1dtaov18-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Mindset-card-with-logo.pdf>
- Suggestions for teaching math as a social activity (geared toward elementary education but some ideas could be transferable to the college setting): <https://www.edutopia.org/math-social-activity-cooperative-learning-video>
- Six tips for brain-based learning: <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/guides/edutopia-6-tips-brain-based-learning-guide-print.pdf>

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation report on “Academic Tenacity: Mindsets and Skills that Promote Long-Term Learning”: <https://ed.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/manual/dweck-walton-cohen-2014.pdf>
- Website with lots of great research and examples of SEL interventions, particularly ones targeting underserved groups: <https://www.scribd.com/document/118972490/Academic-Tenacity-Mindsets-and-Skills-that-Promote-Long-Term-Learning>
- Team-building activities for the classroom: <http://teachthought.com/pedagogy/student-engagement/10-team-building-games-for-the-first-day-of-class/>
- Guidelines for developing “juicy” questions: <https://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/stw/edutopia-stw-assessment-high-sch-humanities-discussion-questions-guide.pdf>
- Article on the connection between feeling powerful and learning: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/blogs/secretlife/blogposts/the-science-of-smart-feeling-powerful-makes-you-think-better/>.
- Article on tips to get students motivated: <https://hub.wiley.com/community/exchanges/educate/blog/2016/08/11/7-tips-to-get-students-motivated?referrer=exchanges>
- Article on how to motivate students to work harder: <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/09/how-to-get-insecure-students-to-work-harder/379500/>
- Teaching tips from Eric Jensen, author of *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*: <http://www.jensenlearning.com/news/why-teach-differently-to-those-from-poverty/teaching-with-poverty-in-mind#postcomment>
- Article on how mindset and a sense of belonging (along with other factors) affects ability to graduate: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/magazine/who-gets-to-graduate.html>
- A research review and overview of SEL: <https://www.edutopia.org/sel-research-learning-outcomes>
- Greater Good Science Center article making the case on teaching happiness skills: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/should_student_success_include_happiness

Books and Journal Articles

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