SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS: A FRAMEWORK FOR PEDAGOGY AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Research has shown that Social Emotional Learning (SEL) enhances student-teacher relationships, enhances students' learning and their success in school and in life, and improves teachers' well-being and job satisfaction. This article presents a theoretical overview of the social emotional learning benefits to students and teachers using Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning CASEL's competencies as a conceptual framework. A number of practical strategies and examples based on SEL competencies are presented, such as classroom strategies to build student-teacher relationships and improve students' learning and behavior, and strategies to enhance teachers' wellbeing and work satisfaction. It is concluded that emotions and learning are inseparable, and they play a vital role in students' academic success. The role the teachers should be help their students understand their emotions and those of others, know how to interact with others and become more caring, responsible and empathetic citizens, and learn how to set goals and make wise decision that will affect their present and future.

Keywords

Social emotional learning, classroom management, social emotional learning classroom strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Social emotional learning (SEL) has been known to make the classroom environment more conducive to children's learning. It has also been associated with improved academic test scores, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, effective problem-solving and decision-making skills, and fewer discipline and behavioral problems. SEL teaches a variety of skills, such as empathy, self-control and a positive mindset, and it has also been found to have immediate and long-term benefits on both students and teachers. SEL competencies help students and teachers cope with everyday challenges and demands, and improves learning and wellbeing.

This article aims to present a theoretical overview of the conceptual framework of social emotional learning (SEL) and its impact long-term benefits to academic learning and classroom management, followed by practical SEL strategies for students and teachers.

A brief overview of social emotional learning

Social and emotional skills begin developing from birth and are part of everyday life. Like other skills, such as cognition or language, social and emotional skills are essential in promoting learning, achievement goals, decision making, empathy and also in regulating emotions. Social emotional learning is multifaceted and impacts in a significant way not just individuals, but also schools, communities and the society at large (Kamath, 2020).

A critical period of children's social-emotional development is spent at school, and how learners and teachers feel in the classroom could either enhance or interfere with the learning journey (Williams et al., 2015). Emotions and learning are inseparable and they influence the dynamic of the learning environment and cognitive skills such as attention, memory, executive function, decision-making, critical thinking, problem

solving and regulation. Positive learning emotions such as interest, creativity, curiosity, passion, and engagement activate the reward system in the brain, make the learning experience desirable, and sustain focus and attention. On the other end of the spectrum, negative emotional states such as anxiety, stress, fear, worry and disengagement interfere with the learning process and kills students' motivation and their ability to learn (Desautels, 2023; Immordino-Yang, 2007; Sprenger, 2020). This is why schools are considered "appropriate places" to teach SEL (Weissberg, 2019) and expected to play an important role in developing children's social and emotional competences (European School Education Platform, 2022; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Students are social and emotional beings and cognition alone is not sufficient for success in the classroom or later on in life (Goleman, 1995).

Social emotional skills would not only help students create a balance between their interpersonal and intrapersonal needs, but it will also help them problem-solve, address stressful situations, and become responsible and resilient adults. Research suggests that students who experience positive mental health and wellbeing are more likely to engage meaningfully in academic activities and perform better academically, have higher self-esteem and greater empathy, and enjoy heathier and more positive relationships (Desautels, 2023; Sala et al., 2020; Sprenger, 2020). SEL is more relevant than ever in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic which significantly impacted all learners, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds, and affected their psychological well-being.

Social emotional learning supports long-term academic learning for all children and it is backed by evidence-based research. Based on a meta-analysis (Durlak et al., 2011) of 213 school-based SEL programs, it was found that when compared to controls, SEL participants (148,189 students) showed significantly improved social and emotional skills (23%), improved achievement test scores (11%), improvement in

attitudes about self, others and school (9%), improvement in school and classroom behavior (9%), and decrease in emotional distress such as anxiety and depression (10%) and in conduct problems, such as classroom misbehavior and aggression (9%). Moreover, the study has found that the benefits of SEL training are long term. Children who received SEL training in kindergarten were less likely to commit crimes, use drugs or psychiatric medications, or be on public housing lists, and were more likely to graduate from high school on time and have stable employment.

Other follow up studies that examined the longer-term benefits of SEL programs echoed the earlier findings and pointed out that there were both immediate and long-term benefits to students' academic, social and emotional skills (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Osher et al., 2016; Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017; Wiglesworth et al., 2016). On the other hand, students lacking competency in SEL skills are more likely to struggle with organizational aspects and completion of assignments, are less actively engaged in class and social activities, and have difficulty in managing depression, anxiety, or anger (Eklund et al., 2019).

Theoretical framework

This article is based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, also known as the "CASEL 5" or "CASEL wheel" (Figure 1). CASEL is an organization based at University of Illinois in Chicago promoting SEL in North America and internationally, and helping schools make SEL programs part of P-12 education. According to CASEL (2023), social emotional learning is defined as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for

others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (CASEL, 2023, para 1). In other words, SEL is the process that helps learners develop social and emotional skills needed to effectively recognize and manage their emotions, and respond to stressful situations without fear of being judged or punished. SEL also gives students adequate tools to build healthy relationships with others, solve problems effectively, make intelligent decisions and achieve success in goal setting.

The CASEL model identified five core comprehensive and interrelated areas of competence associated with SEL, also known as the five main competencies which can be taught and implemented at different developmental stages, from childhood to adulthood, and also across diverse cultural contexts. The following is a short summary of the five competencies and key components of effective SEL (CASEL, 2023):

- *Self-awareness* – the ability to identify and recognize one's emotions, thoughts and values; to recognize their strengths and limitations, sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence; and understand how their behaviors, attitude and actions are influenced in different situations. This will help students create a mindset that facilitates continuous growth.
- *Self-management* – the ability to manage and regulate one's impulses, emotions, and behaviors in challenging situations, in order to stay motivated and achieve their goals. This is a critical component of success both in school and in life.
- *Social awareness* – the ability to understand, respect and empathize with other people's views or perspectives who may come from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. It also involves respect for others by identifying social norms of behavior in different settings and demonstrating empathy to others.

- *Relationship skills* – the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with others through communication, active listening, cooperation and collaboration, and also negotiation during conflict situations.
- *Responsible decision making* – the ability to make well-informed decisions, to evaluate judgments, and to make meaningful and constructive deductions and inferences across different contexts, by taking into consideration consequences, as well as ethical, moral and safety standards.

The main purpose of these competencies is to facilitate both immediate benefits, such as students' academic performance and social relationships, reduced behavioral problems and psychological distress, and also long-term benefits for young people to succeed in school, as well as later in life (Elias, 2014; Jones & Kahn, 2017). The development of SEL competencies is related to the neuropsychology concept of Executive Functioning (EF) that helps students build higher level cognitive and social emotional skills. Executive functions are not born. They are rather learned at different developmental stages through various experiences, many times through experiences provided in school settings.

If EF skills provide students with cognitive tools, SEL provides them with awareness to apply cognitive processes to different situations. In other words, "SEL has students ready to learn, while EF is necessary for learning to take place" (Sprenger, 2023, para 1). For example, when faced with assignments, students use EF skills such as time management, task completion, structure and organization in combination with SEL competencies of mental control and self-regulation when approaching challenging assignments without procrastinating and having feelings of frustration towards school. The same applies in relationship situations, when EF skills help students remember social norms of behavior in combination with SEL competencies of empathy, understanding other people's

views, and the capacity to make and maintain friendships (Blair, 2010; Liew, 2011; Perry, 2020; Ursache, Blair, & Raver, 2012).

According to Kamath (2020, para 1), "All aspects of schooling require social-emotional competency and a mastery of executive function," and they are directly interconnected. In the learning context, students are making use of both, EF and its three components (working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility), and SEL and its competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making). When teachers integrate EF and SEL into all aspects of schooling, they equip their students with cognitive and emotional skills to guide their internal feelings and external behaviors, strategies to get through personal and interpersonal challenges and difficulties in life, and impulse inhibition in order to delay gratification and work collaboratively in different social contexts in order to achieve goals (Sprenger, 2023).

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Classroom management is a fundamental skill set for teachers to facilitate a positive, supportive and structured learning environment for all students and establish clear classroom expectations and procedures. Classroom management ties very well into social emotional learning, as evidenced in a study conducted by Jones et al. (2014) and supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Paraphrasing Alan Beck's (1994) words, Maslow should come before Bloom, as SEL teaches students how to deal with stress and anxiety, and only then they will be able to focus on higher-level thinking.

The school classroom is a wonderful place for students to develop social and emotional skills if they are provided with a safe learning environment designed to facilitate student

engagement, collaboration, connection, decision making, and to help students learn to process their emotions. Learning is enhanced in a classroom environment where students feel safe to take risks, acquire new skills and knowledge, and know they are valued and appreciated (Evertson et al., 2003; National Research Council, 2000). Research shows that SEL should not be an add on for the teacher, but rather integrated into the classroom life, connected to academic content, and made part of the classroom routines and procedures throughout the school year (Norris, 2003).

Dr. Jacqueline A. Norris (2003), assistant professor of education at The College of New York, emphasizes that a fundamental SEL skill is helping students develop their ability to recognize emotions when they experience them and develop appropriate ways to deal with them. This implies that students need to have the appropriate language skills to identify their feelings, and understand that very often they may feel more than one emotion at the same time. For example, they may feel excited about going on a field trip or vacation, but upset about missing a friend's birthday party.

Students also need to learn that beyond naming their emotions, they need to learn how to act and respond appropriately when feeling angry or upset. Classroom activities appropriate for teaching these skills include reading and discussing stories or real-life cases where individuals have had to deal with similar emotions, and having students role play appropriate ways of handling emotions (Sprenger, 2020). Students could also be taught to use Active Listening, I-Messages and other effective communication skills to learn how to express themselves, and how they are affected by other people's words and actions. Active listening could teach them how to paraphrase message received from others and check on their understanding, and I-Messages activities could teach them how to avoid blaming others. Other activities such as pair-share, role play and other group activities can teach them skills such as, empathy,

decision-making, problem solving, goal setting, consequential thinking and copying strategies to deal with their emotions, conflict and challenges (Norris, 2003).

As teachers integrate these SEL skills into the academic content, students will learn how to apply and practice these skills in academic subjects as well. For example, in language arts and history students could be asked to discuss and role play conflicts in a story or novel by getting into the skin of various characters and taking on different perspectives. This will help students have a richer and more accurate experience, and build empathy. To develop decision-making and problem-solving skills, teachers could ask students to complete a "Problem Solving Diary" and write about the problems they were having and the alternative approaches for solving their own problems or any conflictual situations. This could even be used for disciplinary situations and for discussion consequences for students' actions (Norris, 2003; Sprenger, 2020).

The following is a list of practical strategies and activities developed by researchers on how to implement SEL into the classroom and they can greatly benefit students of all ages. These strategies are adapted from Dr. Marilee Sprenger's (2020) book, "*Social-emotional learning and the brain: strategies to help your students thrive*," and they are based on CASEL's competencies.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO BUILD STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Positive and supportive student-teacher relationships have many benefits and have long-lasting implications for students' academic and social development, and are known to contribute to higher achievement levels and improved classroom management. The following are some suggestions on how to foster positive student-teacher relationships:

Greet students at the door

Greeting students at the door as they arrive for school or leave is one of the best ways to develop personal connections with them. Saying their names, making eye contact, and giving them a few words of encouragement as they walk through the door, is a valuable experience. Along with a verbal welcome, some students may prefer a handshake or a hug. Research (Cook et al., 2018) has found that greeting students every morning led to a 20% increase in achievement and 9% decrease in disruptive behaviors.

Use ways to show you care for the students

According to Sprenger (2020), students need to know that teachers truly care for them by *providing structure* (rules fairly applied to all and consistent expectations); *offering choice*s (students seek autonomy and need to be involved in decisions); *showing interest* (learning personal information about students' lives, asking them questions about their favorite music or their favorite sport or sports events they are involved in); *being optimistic* (ensure your students that you believe in them and their ability to succeed); and *acknowledge their feelings* (help them process their feelings and show emotional support).

Call students by name

Calling students by name is very important as it gets their attention and it tells them that they are important. This enhances the student-teacher relationships and it gives students "a feeling of belonging that can make a world of difference to your students" (Sprenger, 2020, p. 26). While some students may enjoy to be called on all the time and get to answer or ask questions, others maybe more shy or reluctant to be called on as they may not know the answer or feel embarrassed. To be fair to all students, teachers can use different strategies to call on their students, such as: *equity stick* (write each student's

name on a popsicle stick, place them in a cup and draw one name each time you ask a question) or *stack the deck* (write students names on an index card and pick off a card each time you call on students).

Nurture student–teacher relationships

Establishing, maintaining and restoring student-teacher relationships is very important as it increases academic engagement and it decreases disruptive behavior. Strategies to establish relationships include positive greetings at the door, asking open-ended and reflective questions, and incorporating student-led activities. Strategies for maintaining student-teacher relationships include regular check-ins, positive interactions, and recognition of good behavior. Repairing and restoring student-teacher relationships maybe be necessary at times, and may come in different forms such as: avoid keeping track of students' mistakes; criticize behavior, not the student; take responsibility for your part of the problem when needed; work with the students affected and make things right, then follow up (Sprenger, 2020).

Teach empathy

Teachers have a great opportunity to help their students develop empathy and compassion for others, and can use strategies such as: *modeling* (students watch their teachers' reactions and interactions with other students); *seeking to understand* (ask students: "can you help me understand how you see this?") helps lower student's stress and it makes it easier for them to trust and share with you; *creating a kindness wall* with captions like, "What kind act did you see or do today?"– students can be encouraged to show kindness by giving them the opportunity to write kind notes and place them on bulletin boards; *engaging students in community service projects* such as food drives, visiting nursing homes or picking up litter – this

gives students an opportunity to do something for others and identify with other's needs; *reading* helps students relate to and empathize with characters from books and stories (Sprenger, 2020).

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO TEACH SELF-AWARENESS

Teachers have a great opportunity to help students become aware of their feelings. The following are strategies to help students become aware of what they are feelings, name them feeling and respond to them in a healthy way.

Check-ins

Student check-ins are a great way to get to know students better and learn about their challenges, to find out how they are feeling and make them aware of themselves. Sprenger (2020) makes the following suggestions:

- As they arrive in the morning, ask students to write on a *sticky note* the answer to the question "How are you feeling right now?"
- Use the colors of a *stoplight* to encourage students to express how they feel. They can choose the color that best describes their current emotional state. Green may indicate a good emotional state and mean go right in and begin your work. Students in the green zone are typically feeling happy, safe, content, focused, cooperative, ready to learn and solve problems. Yellow means slow down and be careful since their brain is sending their body a warning that they may be in danger of upsetting others. Students in the yellow zone may be stressed, irritable, tired, hungry, thirsty, sad, frustrated, misunderstood, ignored, or worried. Red means stop and seek help. Students in the red zone may feel frozen in fear or ready to run away as their hearts may be

pounding, muscles tightening, and breathing getting faster. Their body is sending a red light warning and they need to first calm their feelings before they are ready to focus and learn.

- Use an *emoji* chart similarly to the stoplight approach by using colors (e. g. yellow for joy, red for anger, blue for sadness, green for disgust and purple for fear) to help students express and label their emotions. Some teachers use a desk chart for each student, while others prefer a large wall chart where students can check and identify their feelings.

- Use an *inventory check-in* by asking students to finish a sentence of answer a question by using five or less words to describe their previous day (e. g. "The best news I've had in the past week is _____; "What is the main challenge you face in school/family right now?"

- Use *remote check-ins* when students are sick or don't show up at school, by letting them know that they are missed and you are thinking about them. When students are out of school for extended periods of time, initiate a video call once a week to show them you care and find out how they are doing. Placing a phone call, initiating a video call or a home visit, could be great avenues for check-ins.

Emotion word wall to foster emotional literacy

Emotion Word Walls (Table 1) are helpful for students' social emotional learning, but also for developing their vocabulary to describe the feelings expressed by some of the characters studied in different classes. Emotion labeling plays an important role in self-regulation and responding to conflicts in a healthy manner.

Journaling

This is an appropriate activity for adolescents to develop a sense of self-awareness. Students can either journal to explore and evaluate their own thoughts, emotions and behaviors, or their favorite characters from language arts, history or science.

Listening to the body

This is a great way to help students have a good relationship with their body and learn how to self-regulate. Children who learned to suppress their feelings because of being told that what they are feeling or doing is wrong, don't trust themselves. Also, children who experienced traumatic events may be disconnected from their feelings, and instead of anxiety or fear they have stomachaches muscle tightness or sweaty hands, and instead of anger or frustration they have tightness in the chest, rapid heartbeat, accelerated breathing or teeth gritting. Dr. Desautels (2023) suggests that teaching students to listen to their bodies, to be present with themselves and be aware of their nervous systems is vital, as "brains in pain cannot learn".

Growth mindset activities

The term *'growth mindset'* has been coined by Dr. Carol Dweck (2006). Nurturing a growth mindset in students is essential to SEL as it helps them see challenges and obstacles as learning opportunities and as a way to progress toward their desired goals and outcomes. Teachers could use short questionnaires to help students develop their mindsets, by asking questions such as: "Do you give up easily? Could you change so that you give up less easily?"; "When you are faced with a difficult task, how likely are you to stick with it?"; "How confident are you that you can find ways to accomplish your goals?" Teachers could also use reflective journal writing exercises or drawing and ask students to write or draw something that represents their feelings, or think of the progress

they made on a task or in their behavior. Students could also reflect on the last time they showed empathy to a classmate, or brainstorm strategies they could use next time to solve a team problem and do things differently. These are great exercises to help students boost their self-efficacy and self-confidence, see how their emotions affect themselves and others, and foster a growth-mindset.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO TEACH SELF-MANAGEMENT

If self-awareness teaches students how to identify and become aware of their emotions, self-management teaches them how to deal with those emotions, or how to self- regulate and coregulate. The goal of any teacher should be to help their students learn how to regulate their thoughts, emotions and actions in various settings and situations by teaching them CASEL's (2015) six components of self-management: impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal setting and organizational skills. Here are some examples:

Begin and end each class with deep breathing

Researchers (Desautels, 2023; Elias, 2014) suggest breathing exercises to help students control their impulses. Three deep inhales and exhales oxygenate the frontal lobe, calm the emotional brain and release anxiety and fear. Breathing exercises help students regulate their feelings, calm down and transition to a state of learning readiness. There are many different breathing techniques and the following are some examples:

- *Flower breaths*: ask students to make a fist and pretend they hold a flower. Ask students to smell the flower and take a deep breath in through the nose, hold the breath in, and then slowly breathe out through the mouth so they don't disturb the flower.

- *4 x 4*: ask students to breathe in through their nose to the count of four, hold for a count of four, exhale through their mouth to a count of four, and hold again for a count of four.
- *4-7-8*: ask students to close their eyes, breathe in through their nose to the count of four, hold the breath for a count of seven, then exhale through their mouth to the count of eight. This can work very well with some calming music playing as they breathe.

The 90-second rule

According to Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor (2000), Harvard brain scientist, when we have a strong emotional response, it takes only ninety seconds for the stress chemicals produced by this response to be flushed out of our systems. To help students learn how to use the ninety second rule, a number of educators (Foreman, 2019; Sprenger, 2020) developed the following strategies:
- *N.A.B.B* is a strategy developed by Foreman, a primary school teacher from Dublin. Each letter of this acronym stands for an action which children need to carry out. **N** – name the emotion; **A** – accept the strong emotion; **B** – breathe by keeping attention to the breath; **B** – body (connect to your body as you breathe and try to feel your breath going right down to your feet)
- *CBS* stands for count, breath and squeeze. This is a strategy created by Dr. Sprenger, an author and international educational consultant for social emotional learning, literacy, vocabulary and brain research. Counting helps the brain calm down and allows the students to focus on something other than the trigger. Breathing regulates the heart rate and chemicals that control respiration. Squeezing something – a stress ball,

stuffed animal, the hands – and releasing is great for lessening tension and releasing anger.

Tone of voice

Students are more likely to learn self-management and self-regulation if they experience a calm environment, and if the teacher's body language and tone of voice communicates to them that they are safe and cared for. In a video "Demonstrating Self-Regulation with Tone of Voice," Linda Darling-Hammond (2019) emphasizes that "developing a calm, neutral, assertive voice" helps both teachers and students self-regulate, and assure students that the teacher is receptive to their needs. Dr. Sprenger (2020) suggests a helpful website (www.pbis-world.com/tier-1/use-calm-neural-tone/) to guide the teachers on the process of acquiring a calm, neutral tone and why, when and how to use it.

Calm down stations

Classrooms calming stations should be safe places where students can go calm down for a short amount of time using pre-taught strategies. These places or locations may include a couch, bean bag chairs, soft rugs, or even a bathtub with pillows, as well as some stress balls, playdough (kinetic sand) or pinwheels to helps students with breath regulation and stress relief. Other ideas for calming could be sensory bottles filled with a combination of water, glitter, food coloring and glue, or sand timers. As the students shake the bottle and watch the glitter settle, teachers can tell students that just as the glitter settles, so does their anger (or any other emotion) as well. Highschoolers and older children can benefit from strategies such as "talk it out" or "walk it out." Frey, Fisher and Smith (2019) suggest the TLC strategy - placing a table and chair in the hallway with a sign reading "How can I help?" and staff

member sitting at the table for anyone who would like to take a seat and dialogue or regroup.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO TEACH SELF-DISCIPLINE

Self-discipline is the ability to do what you should do, when you should do it, regardless of the circumstances. The self-discipline child will complete or stay on task even when no one is watching, and will follow directions and turn in assignments on time not because they expect a reward or want to avoid consequences, but because they know it is the right thing to do. Sprenger (2020) suggests two strategies to effectively teach students self-discipline:

Party-planning experience

One way to help students plan ahead is to give them the opportunity to plan a party. In the process they will have to figure out what they need, how much it costs, what guests to invited and how to invite them. This can give students the necessary skills to move on to the next level of planning for a test or project. Also, you can role model to them how planning ahead helps them as a classroom get things done.

Brain break

Children's attention span is about two to three minutes per year of age, and there are four types of attention. Sprenger (2020) suggests that for most students focused attention is somewhere between five and ten minutes. After this time, students may feel the need to move around or they will lose focus and disengage from learning. This is the reason why children need breaks periodically and some novelty in order to change the predictable routine and refocus. Students lose focus when things become too predictable, but are able to refocus when they are exposed to novelty as the brain releases a number of

hormones and the reticular system gets activated. According to Sprenger (2020), the following could be used as examples of brain breaks:

- *Singing or dancing*
- *Content related movement* (e. g., "Stand up and talk to three classmates about something related to the Civil War;" "draw waves with your hands while repeating vocabulary words;" doing a four-corner quiz by placing quiz questions in different corners of the classroom and having students go around to answer the quiz
- *Movement for fun* (e. g., Have students walk around the room and touch three blue round shaped objects and three yellow square shaped objects before they sit down; doing a jumping jack when students know the answer to a question; "snowball fights" with crumbled paper; squats)
- *Balance the book* (e. g., Have students walk around the room balancing a book on their head).

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO TEACH SOCIAL AWARENESS

Social awareness refers to the ability to show empathy and understand other individuals' perspective. Teachers should teach their students to recognize their own emotions and respect other people's emotions and perspectives, and understand the social and ethical norms that guide different contexts. Educators should also create opportunities for their students to learn how to listen, handle disagreements, engage in critical thinking, and how to learn from their mistakes. Students with strong social awareness skills are more likely to empathize with others' perspectives and use constructive communication to solve conflicts, and less likely to engage in disruption classroom behavior. The following are some specific strategies for helping students develop social awareness:

The hats we wear, the roles we play

A teacher could do the following exercise to teach students about the many roles we play. She could wear several hats on her head as she enters the room, or she could place different name tags on her about her different roles (teacher, mother, wife, sister, daughter, friend, etc.). Then she should allow students to ask questions and write their own labels to illustrate the roles they have. This is a great opportunity to raise social awareness and provide opportunities for students to learn from one another, and to become aware of who they are, their multiple roles and the implications of those roles in different contexts (e. g., "Mark is Ana's brother and Matthew's friend, but right now he needs to wear the student hat and behave accordingly").

Watching facial expressions and body language

Sprenger (2020) emphasizes that helping students recognize and distinguish different facial expressions and their meaning could be a great way to increase their social awareness. This could be done either in real life or through media, and the discussions could be incorporated in any content area, as follows

- In history: What were Napoleon's facial expressions at Waterloo?
- In science: How did Willis Carrier look when he realized he had invented the air conditioner? How do you look when you enter into an air-conditioned room after being outside on a hot summer day?
- In language arts: How did Wilbur look when Charlotte died in *Charlotte's Web*? How did you look when you read about it? What were Sophie's facial expressions when she had to make a choice in the book *Sophie's Choice*?
- In math: How do you look when you have finished a problem and are done with your math homework?

What is your facial expression when you know you worked the problem correctly?

Journaling

Teachers should encourage students to write in their journals, things such as: what they can do to help others feel more included or like they belong; or how can they tell when one of their friends is sad or having a bad day, and what can they do to help them feel better; why is important for them to be in tune with other people's thoughts and feelings?

Social media awareness

Our students are very active on social media these days and a significant part of their communication occurs online. Students need to be aware of social media norms and how easily misunderstood and misinterpreted could be "faceless messages" that lack facial expression, tone of voice and body language. Students also need to be warned of the dangers of exposing others online either through senseless messages or videos, or sharing such messages and contributing to others' embarrassment and emotional hurt. This could cause shame and guilt, anger, and dysregulation as it last in the cyberspace for the rest of a student's life (Sprenger, 2020).

Listening to understand and show respect

Teachers could help students enhance their listening skills and respect to others through practice on how to use appropriate eye contact and facial expressions, how to regulate thoughts in order to limit distractions, and how to provide appropriate oral responses. A number of questions could be used to help students connect social awareness and listening skills. Some examples are: "Did I ask appropriate, respectful and relevant questions?"; "Did my tone of voice and body language

appropriately convey how I was feeling?"; "Did I respond respectfully and appropriately to some else's feelings?"

Think, pair, share

This is a well-known strategy used in cooperative learning that could be used successfully in teaching social awareness. According to Sprenger (2020), the following prompts could be used when starting conversations that include social emotional learning strategies:

- *Think*: Before initiating a conversation, be aware of you own feelings on the topic and the feelings of your conversation partner.
- *Pair*: If your discussion partner has a different view on the content of the topic, be respectful of your differences.
- *Share*: Share conversation time fairly by getting equal time to share.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Developing relationship skills could be a very complex process. According to CASEL (2015), establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with others from different social and cultural backgrounds, requires clear communication, good listening skills, cooperative skills, ability to negotiate conflict and resist inappropriate social pressure, and capacity to evaluate when to seek and offer help as needed. Students would be more likely to handle relationships in a healthy way if they have already developed the first three SEL competencies – self-awareness, self-management and social awareness. Classroom activities that teachers can use to develop and enhance student relationship skills include:

Groupwork and cooperative learning activities

Cooperative learning is valuable in its own right, but it is especially valuable when teaching social and emotional skills. Regular group activities foster a sense of community in the classroom through connectedness among students, relationship building, cooperation and negotiation. They also provide students with opportunities to practice social and emotional competencies as they learn to support and challenge each other, articulate ideas, explain and clarify concepts to one another, solve problems and use metacognition as they reflect on their own thoughts and remain open to their peers' ideas.

One cooperative learning strategy that specifically aids in facilitating relationship building, is called *Jigsaw*. This strategy was created by Eliot Aronson (1978) and his students in the seventies in Austin, Texas, during a time of great tension between the white, Hispanic and African American students due to desegregation. This strategy gives each member of the group an important role to play and encourages listening, engagement and empathy. To implement the jigsaw in the classroom, follow the steps on Dr. Aronson's website at http://www.jigsaw.org/ or on page 190 of Dr. Sprenger's (2020) book *Social-Emotional Learning and the Brain: Strategies to Help Your Students Thrive*.

Another strategy that fosters cooperative learning and relationships is called *Project-Based Learning* (PBL), used to help students enhance listening, organizational, and conflict resolution skills while learning new concepts at a deeper level. If conflict arises, students have to use emotional management skills and find ways to work together to solve the issue. The role of the teacher is to monitor and supervise the process, and intervene only if necessary (Sprenger, 2020).

As relationship skills are enhanced by effective communication, students could be asked to write in their journals after a cooperative learning project, a jigsaw or a problem-based

learning activity, and reflect on whether the group reached its goals and how the student felt about their participation and engagement in the group project.

Roleplaying activities

Roleplaying is a great way to teach students communication skills and respectful interaction with others, as well emotional intelligence and empathy. Asking them to act out the lives of others and walk a mile in someone else's shoes is an effective way to help students learn how to empathize, solve conflicts and control impulses, and also how to see things from different perspectives. Integrating roleplaying into the academic curriculum could be done through debating and taking roles in supporting an argument. Roleplaying can be also used in content areas by having students do a project on a historical or science figure and writing about the person's life, not just how they became famous. Integrating SEL into specific subjects could be done through card games in math lessons or a discussion between x and y, or by incorporating SEL vocabulary into creative writing exercises, or by role playing an interaction between soldiers from different camps during the Civil War. Role-playing is considered to be an effective way to foster connection among students, teach them conflict resolution, and empathy by putting themselves in someone else's shoes.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

Decision making is an important part of our lives and is based on our time, values and priorities. According to CASEL (2015), responsible decision-making is "the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms". Responsible decision making teaches students how to identify and solve problems, analyze situations, evaluate

choices and consequences for themselves and others, and reflect on the outcome. The following strategies could be useful in fostering responsible decision making among students:

Give choice through classroom jobs

Teachers can create a "choice board" listing classroom jobs with a short description. These jobs could include passing and collecting papers, answering phones, reporting, etc. These may seem simple jobs, but they can teach students about shared responsibility, self-management, respect and decision making while they choose what jobs they like most, whether to fulfill their responsibility from the front of the class to the back or vice versa, or how to prioritize their jobs based on importance or preference (Sprenger, 2020).

Debates

A great way to develop decision-making skills in the classroom is through debate. There are different types of debates to take into consideration, as suggested by Sprenger (2020):

The Four Corners strategy is very effective in teaching students effective listening skills, respectful cooperation and decision making. After deciding on a topic, different options of that topic are assigned to each corner of the room. Students then choose to go to the corner that best suits their personal opinion. Each corner is given five minutes to discuss their position, and then each team gets a chance to present their arguments.

SPAR Debates stand for spontaneous argumentation debates based on minimal research. Students are given a topic such as, "Lying is sometimes justified," "School uniforms should be required," or "Books are better than television." Students are required to work in groups for a few minutes to prepare their arguments, with half of the group to support one position and the other half to support the other position.

Students will be "sparring" with the students sitting across from them and will be given time to make their case. At the end, take time to debrief and discuss with the students what was the most difficult part for them and what they learned from the process.

Magic 8-ball

This problem-solving strategy has been developed by the Ecological Approaches of Social Emotional Learning Laboratory (EASEL) at Harvard University to help teachers integrate SEL in their classrooms. As part of the activity, the teacher gives students a discussion topic or a question such as, "If a person does X [e. g., Cross the street without watching], what might happen?" Students would then look inside the imaginary Magic 8-balls and brainstorm ideas regarding the potential consequences of the action and responses in other situations. The teacher would then follow up and check with the students whether they saw the consequences discussed as positive, negative or neutral, and in which other situations they might need to imagine an outcome (Sprenger, 2020).

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

Social and emotional skills benefit not only the students in an academic setting, but the teachers as well. Teaches who have an understanding of the social emotional competencies and incorporate them into the classroom, create better positive relationships into the classroom and enhance self-control and empathy. These teachers experience less burnout and are better equipped to deal with challenging behaviors in the classroom. Also, being able to show empathy improves their sense of wellbeing not only in their professional area, but also in their personal lives (Mercer et al., 2018).

The following suggestions of how SEL can benefit teachers are based on Dr. Shivohn N. Garcia's (n.d.) recommendations. Dr. Garcia (n.d.) is an experienced educator and the senior director of the Impact team at Understood, a non-profit organization providing resources to educators and supporting people who learn and think differently. She emphasizes that SEL benefits not just students, but educators as well, as they both need to "feel valued and safe". Her suggestions are based on the CASEL's five core competencies, and stresses that it is important for teachers to develop their own social and self-awareness, self-management, relationship and decision-making skills, and make their classes a safe place where students know that they are valued and are able to manage their emotions and set positive goals even beyond the classroom.

Self-awareness competency for teachers

Practicing self-awareness can help teachers recognize and understand their emotions, strengths and challenges, have an accurate self-perception and self-confidence, and practice a growth mindset. For example, if you, as a teacher become upset about a student's behavior, it is suggested that you pause and ask yourself, "Why am I feeling so angry?" Certain behaviors in the classroom might trigger an emotion in us, bring back memories, and cause us to feel or act in a certain way. Being aware of our emotions and being able to identify and understand our feelings before we decide how to respond to the student is very important. Dr. Garcia (n.d.) suggests the following practical ways for teachers to practice self-awareness:

- Acknowledge your own emotions and be aware how they may influence your reactions.
- Name the skills you are using for "think aloud" for your students as you model them.

- Consider students as partners in the process of developing social-emotional skills.
- Understand that students may learn social-emotional skills at different rates and some may take longer than others.

Self-management competency for teachers

The concept of self-management refers to the ability to manage and regulate your emotions, thoughts and behaviors in different situations, and includes skills such as: impulse control, stress management, motivation, setting and achieving goals, and executive functioning skills (e. g., planning and organization). It is well known that teaching is a highly demanding job and teachers have to constantly use self-management skills to meet the daily demands. The following are some ways to practice self-management in the classroom setting (Garcia, n.d.):

- Recognize that students who think and learn differently have different needs that may not have been met in the past by the school system because the curriculum was not flexible enough for their learning and thinking differences.
- Understand that when students are disengaged, they may have experienced inner conflict with school values that may not be historically and culturally diverse enough and representative for themselves.
- Model your own self-management skills to the students and explain "why" you are doing what you are doing.
- Use goal-setting in the classroom and encourage students to set short and long-term life goals.

Social awareness competency for teachers

The ability to show empathy, respect diversity, and appreciate other people's views and perspectives is known social-

awareness. The development of social awareness is vital for teaching and the classroom environment. Building and maintaining healthy relationships with students and parents requires a healthy dose of empathy and respect for all cultures, values and perspectives, as well as differences. Dr. Garcia (n.d.) suggests a few ideas for teachers to how they can practice social awareness in the classroom:

- Get to know the students and their families, and personalize your lessons based on their specific needs.
- Build a classroom community that values all students and is focused on the collective good.
- Make the classroom a safe space for all students and create opportunities for them to talk about and be open to other perspectives that can change your point of view.
- Make the students active participants in the learning process and ask for their feelings and perceptions on the classroom environment.

Decision-making competency for teachers

Responsible decision-making refers to be ability to understand how you and others are impacted by what you do, how you analyze and solve problems, evaluate and reflect on your actions and how you take responsibility for your decisions and their outcomes. Decision-making is an important part of teaching and teacher-student interactions. Teachers have to make decisions every day about time and classroom management, instruction, lesson planning and design, social interactions and self-care. At the same time, teachers play an important role in supporting students make decisions about their learning, behavior, or even their future, as some students may be the first in their families to go to college. Dr. Garcia (n.d.) suggests different ways to practice responsible decision-making in the classroom:

- Understand that teachers need to support their students in learning how to become responsible decision-makers in developmentally appropriate ways.
- Share with your students how you make decisions and help them understand the "why" behind them. At the same time, acknowledge that their process might be different from your own.
- Provide students with examples and help them identify role models who have had similar experiences as your students.

Relationship competency for teachers

Relationship skills refer to the ability to build healthy relationships with others, connect, communicate and listen effectively, resist peer pressure, negotiate and resolve conflict, and receive and provide help as needed. Dr. Garcia (n. d.) suggests that even though human beings are wired for connection and community, relationship skills are not innate, they need to be developed. Engaging with others in meaningful ways and trusting them, requires other social-emotional competencies such as self-awareness and self-management. Developing trusting relationships in the classroom setting might be sometimes challenging as students may struggle at times with expressing themselves. This is the reason why Dr. Garcia suggests that teachers need to model social-emotional skills to their students and partner with them in the process of building their own emotional vocabulary and relationship skills. She gives some practical ideas to practice relationship skills in the classroom setting:

- Before responding to any behavioral issues, search for the "why" behind a student's behavior.
- Point out inappropriate behaviors and provide appropriate alternative ways to respond.

- Acknowledge that these skills may be difficult to practice at times and reassure your students of your support in the process.
- Guide students how to practice problem-solving and avoid conflict by using role-playing and putting themselves into other people's shoes.
- Encourage students and provide them with ways to reflect on their own thinking, behaviors, and relationships.
- Model active listening to your students as you give them feedback.
- Plan classroom activities to teach your students how to build trust and a sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Social Emotional Learning has many benefits for both students and teachers. Research shows that social and emotional factors play an important role in the teaching and learning process, and schools must be active agents in fostering students' social emotional skills. Learning is a social process and students learn better in collaboration with their teachers and in partnership with their peers. Cognition alone is not enough for success in the classroom. Emotions and learning are inseparable, and they can either facilitate or hinder students' learning.

Educators can benefit tremendously from implementing SEL into their classrooms based on CASEL's competencies. SEL improves academic achievement and students' attitudes, motivation, impulse control, and commitment to schoolwork, increases appropriate social behavior, and reduces depression and stress. Teachers with SEL skills are better able to manage their classrooms and foster a healthy learning environment. Furthermore, teachers who incorporate SEL into the classroom experience higher satisfaction with their work, improved

sense of well-being, and higher emotional intelligence as they model the behavior they are teaching to their students.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1
Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

- Identifying emotions
- Accurate self-perception
- Recognizing strengths
- Sense of self-confidence
- Self-efficacy

- Impulse control
- Stress management
- Self-discipline
- Self-motivation
- Goal setting
- Organizational skills

SELF-AWARENESS

SELF-MANAGEMENT

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

SOCIAL AWARENESS

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Perspective-taking
- Empathy
- Appreciating diversity
- Respect for others

- Identifying Problems
- Analyzing Situations
- Problem-solving
- Evaluation
- Reflection
- Ethical responsibility

- Communication
- Social engagement
- Building relationships
- Working cooperatively

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Note: From "How Project-Based Learning Can Promote Social-Emotional Learning Skills" by Teach Thought Staff. Copyright 2023 by TeachThought. https://www.teachthought.com/project-based-learning/teaching-social-emotional-learning-skills/

Table 1

Example of an emotion word wall

FEAR	JOY	SADNESS	ANGER	HAPPY
Afraid	Blissful	Anguished	Agitated	Bright
Alarmed	Calm	Dejected	Annoyed	Content
Anxious	Cheerful	Depressed	Appalled	Cheerful
Apprehensive	Content	Despondent	Cranky	Chirpy
Baffled	Delighted	Down	Critical	Delighted
Cautious	Ecstatic	Downcast	Cross	Glad
Confused	Elated	Drained	Defensive	Joyful
Distressed	Encouraged	Gloomy	Disgusted	Merry
Distrustful	Enthralled	Heartbroken	Enraged	Optimistic
Embarrassed	Excited	Melancholy	Exasperated	Overjoyed
Frightened	Friendly	Miserable	Frustrated	Pleased
Hesitant	Happy	Mournful	Furious	Positive
Horrified	Hopeful	Pessimistic	Hateful	Upbeat
Nervous	Joyful	Unhappy	Horrified	
Paralyzed	Jubilant	Weepy	Hostile	
Panicked	Lively		Irritated	
Petrified	Peaceful		Mad	
Scared	Satisfied		Offended	
Terrified	Smiling		Resentful	
Worried	Thrilled		Riled up	
			Upset	
			Vengeful	

Note: Adapted from "Social Emotional Learning and the Brain: Strategies to Help Your Students Thrive" by M. Sprenger, 2020