Examples of Social and Emotional Learning in High School English Language Arts Instruction

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Within the Collaborating States Initiative many states are developing competencies to articulate goals for what students should know and be able to do in terms of their social and emotional development (Dusenbury et al., 2015). An immediate question from stakeholders and constituents is: How can teachers effectively promote or teach social and emotional competence to achieve these goals? Put another way: What do teachers and other adults need to do in the classroom and school to help students achieve the goals laid out in social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies?

In the past 15 years CASEL has produced three separate guides to evidence-based programs designed to promote student social and emotional development (CASEL, 2003; CASEL 2013; CASEL, 2015). We believe our reviews of the actual content of evidence-based programs helps inform the answers to the important question of how adults can effectively promote student SEL in the classroom and school. The purpose of this document is to draw on these previous reviews of evidence-based programs to identify and describe some of the most common strategies used to promote student SEL.

An English Language Arts (ELA) and literacy curriculum is enhanced when it is intentional about developing social and emotional learning (SEL) core competencies.

- ***Self-Awareness and Self-Management.*** *All education is based on the implicit assumption that students will have the self-management skills necessary to calm themselves and focus their attention sufficiently so that they can effectively participate in learning, including ELA learning. Further, all learning, including ELA, assumes that students will have goal setting skills to complete academic assignments.*
- ***Social Awareness.*** *Effective writing and speaking depends on the ability to take the perspective of a reader or listener. Characters in literature represent different perspectives. Perspective taking is an essential skill in effective speaking and in written and spoken communication. Perspective taking is part of the SEL core competency of social awareness.*
- ***Relationship Skills.*** *English language arts and literacy curricula may be explicitly organized to develop speaking and listening skills, as well as collaborative skills, which are an essential part of the SEL core competency of relationship skills.*
- ***Responsible Decision-Making.*** *ELA assumes that students will **have** the ability to evaluate options and make effective decisions to complete assignments.*

English Language Arts (ELA) can be enhanced when instruction and teaching practices are explicitly designed to promote all five core competencies of social and emotional learning (SEL). We know from research that when curriculum and instruction are intentional about giving students the chance to develop core social and emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, this significantly increases academic achievement, improves attitudes and behaviors, decreases negative behaviors, and reduces emotional distress.[1] Effective ELA instruction builds upon these competencies to drive student learning and engagement.

For example, through ELA, educators can support students to:

- See the connections between current tasks and their personal goals and interests; reflect on their personal aspirations, goals, and objectives in writing assignments (**self-awareness**).
- Develop skills for focusing attention, managing stress and anxiety, and accomplishing goals in order to effectively participate in classroom learning (**self-management**).
- Develop empathy and perspective-taking in their thinking, reading, and writing processes (**social awareness**).
- Develop speaking and listening skills for presentations and learn to collaborate in groups where they are encouraged to consider the perspectives and thought processes of their peers (**relationship skills**).
- Use writing to reflect on choices and goals as a way of developing strong decision-making skills (**responsible decision-making**).

In short, core social and emotional learning competencies can help students to develop stronger ELA skills and to become college and career ready.

Activities and Practices
(11th Grade)

Self-Awareness	
Lessons/Activities	Provide vocabulary words for feelings. (e.g., elated, blue/down, rejected/disappointed, angry/enraged).
	Have students generate additional vocabulary words that extend their emotions vocabulary.
	Lead a class activity that asks students to identify feelings they might have in different situations using vocabulary (e.g., lead discussions using questions such as, "How would you feel if you got all As on your report card?," "How would you feel if your friends left you out when they were planning an activity?," "How would you feel if someone said something nasty about your girlfriend or boyfriend on social media?").
	Set up small-group discussions that allow students to discuss how and why emotions can influence our behaviors (e.g., what happens when we get angry?).
	Use a literature selection to have students identify a time they may have had the same feelings as a character and ask them to discuss in small groups (or write in their journals or on an essay question) how they handled those situations.
	Use a novel or short story to discuss the characters' feelings and how those feelings affected others and ultimately the outcome of the story
	Ask students to identify their own personal strengths and weaknesses that they'd like to work on in art or in an essay, or in media /video productions, etc.
	Have students complete a project to identify their own personal interests or strengths (e.g., write an essay to share with a parent at home or in peer pair share, create a video or other media project).
Teaching Practices	Routinely provide authentic feedback and ask questions that help students reflect on their own strengths and interests. E.g., "I can tell you're really enjoying this project. Can you tell me what about this is making you feel so energized/motivated/happy?" or "I can tell you're really proud of how you did on this report/project. Can you tell me what about this you're most proud of?"
	Routinely give students the opportunity to reflect on what they like to read, or what kinds of novels, short stories, prose, or poetry they like to read – on essay questions, journal questions, or in student pair shares. Also ask students why they like to read the types of materials they identified.
	Tell students routinely authentic reasons why you as their teacher feel happy/optimistic for them and their future.
	Create class roles and responsibilities that emphasizes individual strengths, areas to improve, and personal and group goals. For example, students might be assigned the roles of taking attendance, arranging chairs, or displaying student work. These roles and responsibilities might also be tied to

	community events. For example, if freshmen coming into the school are having trouble adjusting or experiencing bullying, a buddy system with students in the class might be organized.
	Establish clear norms and consequences so that students can see the impact of their own actions and behaviors on outcomes (e.g., create group academic projects—such as book reports—and help students develop appropriate strategies for providing feedback to each other if someone is not pulling their weight on the team).

Self-Management	
Lessons/Activities	Teach self-management techniques such as belly breathing, yoga positions, counting to ten, self-talk, relaxation exercises, or mental rehearsal, to help students develop concrete techniques for managing stress or anxiety, including for testing or public speaking situations.
	Have students brainstorm ways to motivate themselves.
	Lead students in a discussion of how to use their awareness of emotions as a guide to decision-making. For example, lead a discussion that encourages students to "press 'pause'" when making a decision when they are feeling angry or hurt. Help students understand that it is always better to make important decisions when we are feeling calm.
	Lead discussions about positive ways we can express our feelings (e.g., talk to an adult or friend, put our feelings into words, create media or write an essay or in a journal about how we feel, show our feelings through dance).
	Teach a lesson on the THINK process to help students recognize responsible use of social media before posting an unkind or untrue remark about a person because you are upset. T—is it true, H—is it helpful, I—is it inspiring, N—is it necessary, K—is it kind.
	Teach students a lesson on procedures for class transitions and create class goals for improving the time it takes to complete them.
	Teach students a lesson on how to use certain equipment (such as computers or iPads) and other resources appropriately.
	Use a lesson to establish rules for how equipment (e.g., printers or iPads) should be put away.
	Over the course of several weeks have students work on individual goal projects using goals they identify for themselves. Have them monitor and document their progress for several weeks.
	Define "perseverance" as a vocabulary word.
	During a lesson talk about how you motivate yourself when you need to.
	Teach students to identify what is known about a lesson topic or objective and to identify what they need to know to understand the lesson objective, then how to set a goal to achieve it.

	Lead a discussion that encourages students to reflect on barriers they may encounter when completing an assignment (e.g., finding a computer or color printer they want to use) and that also help them think about ways they can overcome them, including how to approach others for help – e.g., asking a media director for permission to use equipment).
	Lead a discussion (ask questions) about who might be able to help, or what other resources might be available, to complete an assignment.
	Create class projects that require effort (e.g., complete a class writing project to develop a cookbook of favorite family recipes in the class and have a celebration at the end – e.g., invite family to come to a celebration of the cookbook, bringing recipes), and encourage students through to their completion.
	Use literature to discuss how characters persevered through hard times to turn their lives around or reach a goal.
Teaching Practices	As a teacher, consistently model effective self-management in an age-appropriate way for students ("I'm feeling a little frustrated, so I'm going to stop and take a breath before I decide what to do next.")
	Give students authentic feedback for self-management (e.g., "I saw the way you got ready to give your book report just now. I know you were a little nervous, but I saw you take a breath. I'm proud of you, and you should be proud of yourself.").
	Give students support and/or authentic feedback for expressing emotions appropriately (e.g., "I know you're angry at her right now [e.g., for interrupting you]. What are some calm ways you could tell her what you're upset about?" or "I know you were feeling sad about what happened recently. I was proud of you for writing about how you were feeling and what you were doing to feel more peaceful. I'm here if you ever want to talk to me about it.").
	Establish a separate space in the classroom for individual self-management (e.g., reading corner).
	Routinely encourage students to save a desired activity or experience (e.g., getting a shake or fries, going out with a friend) until they have completed tasks or duties (e.g., until they have finished their homework).
	Routinely develop and complete short-term classroom goals (e.g., getting settled after the bell rings).
	Routinely work with the class to establish and complete class projects (e.g., a group project on a poem, short story, or novel – set goals, break the goal down into weekly subgoals, lay out steps for achieving weekly goals, monitor progress toward achieving goals, celebrate achievements).
	Routinely teach students how to use resources appropriately (e.g., how to use reference resources).
	Routinely model and talk about your own goals.
	Routinely provide authentic feedback to students when you observe them managing themselves well (e.g., regulating their emotions by taking a breath, taking a break to think about a decision, etc.).
	Students can also be taught to self-assess progress toward their learning goals, which is a powerful strategy that promotes academic growth and should be an instructional routine in classrooms from grade 4-12.

	Routinely notice and discuss with students when they are being perseverant.
	Routinely ask questions that encourage students to reflect on barriers they may encounter and that also help them think about ways they can overcome them in any difficult situation they are facing.
	Routinely ask students who might be able to help them in various situations or what other resources might be available.
	Help students think through and suggest alternatives when they encounter challenges. Offer to help when needed.
	Give authentic feedback when students persevere (e.g., "I know how hard that was, but you never gave up. You kept on going. I'm very proud of you, and you should be proud of yourself.").
	Routinely encourage students to write in journals or share with partners in pair shares to reflect on why their efforts in certain situations succeeded or failed and what they might do differently in the future.

Social Awareness	
Lessons/Activities	Teach an age-appropriate lesson on how to communicate effectively during public speaking, including a discussion of why it is important to identify how others feel and what to look for (facial cues, body language).
	Define and discuss the word "empathy" as part of vocabulary.
	Discuss the expectations and demands of different settings for public speaking—how we dress and behave for school, places of worship, formal ceremonies, hanging out with friends.
	Discuss more subtle cues in the environment, such as the presence of people of different ages, when people are quiet, etc., in determining what kinds of behaviors are appropriate during public speaking.
	Examine literature and take the perspective of characters, identifying feelings and thoughts.
	Organize and encourage student projects as part of reading literature that explores different cultures and celebrates diversity.
	Celebrate historical figures and characters from literature who resisted stereotypes or worked to promote justice and equality for all individuals.
	Ask students to reflect (including in journals) on questions about the negative effects of stereotyping. Give them opportunities to discuss in pair shares.
	Organize class projects connected to literature to promote awareness of the rights of others.

	Discuss and analyze the origins and negative effects of stereotyping and prejudice, as reflected in literature.
	Study characters in literature who showed respect for or served others, and discuss their example.
	Discuss respectful characters in literature.
	Ask students to write in their journals, or discuss in pair shares, how they try to be helpful in their families or with their peers.
	Work with students to organize a community service project.
Teaching Practices	Routinely discuss characters in literature or figures in history in terms of how they felt and why they took certain actions or behaved the way they did.
	Create small reading groups that allow students a chance to talk about the kinds of things they like to read and why, so that students can begin to see the ways in which other students have similar or different preferences and learn from each other about why other types of reading materials may be fun to read.
	Discuss how we know the way characters in literature feel, based on what the author tells us about the character's behavior
	Routinely examine literature in terms of the perspective of characters or identifying feelings and thoughts.
	Routinely talk about how others feel in different situations.
	Provide students with opportunities to share in small groups how they feel in different situations.
	Allow students to dress up as characters in literature and act out how those individuals were feeling, commenting on how it affected their behavior.
	When there is a difference of opinion among students, allow them to reflect on how they are feeling (writing an essay or in a journal) and then share with a partner or in a small group, to be heard but also to listen to how others feel differently, and why, in the same situation.
	Build respect for diversity in the classroom by having students share their different cultural perspectives on situations.
	Model respect and enthusiasm for learning about diversity – show enthusiasm for literature by authors from many different cultures and support learning about different cultures.
	At holiday time create classroom celebrations that allow students to share and explain traditions from their own family holidays.
	Give everyone an opportunity to participate. Involve family members, asking them to share their traditions with students.
	Model acceptance of others who have different attitudes and values.
	Use cooperative learning and project-based learning strategically (reflecting thoughtfully and intentionally on the composition of groups) to build diverse working groups.
	Organize class meetings to involve students in sharing and recognizing that others have different

	experiences, which develops empathy and appreciation for differences and similarities.
	Routinely ask questions in different situations that make the point that we are all both similar and different.
	Model respectful behavior.
	Model concern for the well-being of others.
	Model service to others.
	Identify and celebrate characters in literature who contributed to their communities. List their contributions and ways they contributed to the common good.
	Give feedback to students in authentic ways when they are respectful toward others. Encourage students to identify how they feel when they were respectful or supportive of another person.
	Ask routine questions throughout the day to draw attention to how students' behavior is affecting those around them.
	Routinely give specific and timely feedback to students for accepting direction well from authority figures.
	Develop and revise classroom rules and norms with students to work together to promote understanding and respect.
	Routinely discuss why we have classroom or school rules in the context of current experiences in the school or classroom.
	Routinely discuss implicit rules and how they are affecting students' current behavior.
	Model and routinely promote a school norm of treating others the way you would want to be treated.
	Routinely remind students, in developmentally appropriate ways, anytime they need help, to think about the resources (formal and informal) that are available to them.
	Work with other teachers and administrators to create a sense of responsibility among adults in the school to be available to help students.

Relationship Skills	
	Teach lessons to develop speaking and listening skills (e.g., how to identify and prepare one's message, how to introduce oneself and be sure others are listening, how to speak loudly and clearly so that others can hear, etc.).
	Teach lessons on effective listening and give students a chance to practice, taking turns in pair shares.

Lessons/Activities	Teach lessons to develop listening, including nonverbal behavioral to show you are listening.
	Teach students how to give feedback in specific situations that will help students improve their communication skills.
	Teach lessons on how to receive constructive feedback.
	Teach lessons on how to give constructive feedback.
	Read literature and discuss characters who learned to forgive others.
	Teach lessons on how to offer help in a sensitive, appropriate way.
	Teach lessons on how to say thank you and receive help well.
	Use literature as an opportunity to teach students a lesson or lessons on how to resolve conflicts peacefully.
Teaching Practices	Use team-based, collaborative teaching practices such as cooperative learning and project-based learning to provide students with opportunities to develop and routinely practice communication, social, and assertiveness skills. Be very intentional when creating groups to balance students so there are natural leaders who can inspire the others they are working with.
	Give students opportunities to practice social skills in small groups and project-based learning activities.
	Give students authentic feedback anytime they work well with others.
	Thank students whenever they listen well and tell them specifically what they did well.
	Use interactive teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and project-based learning to provide students with opportunities to develop and practice positive communication skills.
	Establish class meetings to give students the opportunity to take turns interacting with each other and practicing speaking and listening skills.
	Model and reinforce effective communication and relationship skills
	Establish a conflict resolution process that is used any time there is a conflict.
	Model good conflict resolution skills.
	Give students support as needed when they are working out a conflict.
	Give students authentic feedback for resolving conflicts peacefully.
	Use collaborative work groups (e.g., cooperative learning projects or project-based learning) to reinforce the importance of working together to solve problems and achieve goals.

Responsible Decision-Making	
Lessons/Activities	Teach students a formula for making good decisions (e.g., stop, calm down, identify the problem, consider the alternatives, make a choice, try it out, re-evaluate).
	Ask students to apply the decision-making formula to problems characters face in literature.
	Define responsibility and related terms (ethical, safe, values, honesty). Ask students to write essays about these words.
	Discuss higher-order values demonstrated by figures in literature—being a good citizen, helping the community or country.
	Walk through the steps of problem-solving in response to situations in literature.
	Discuss situations in literature in terms of whether decisions made by characters are ethical. Evaluate against clearly defined ethical criteria.
	Routinely model good decision-making.
	Support students through the steps of making a decision anytime they face a choice or decision.
	Give students authentic feedback for making good decisions.
	Examine problems or moral situations from literature and examine alternatives and their impacts.
	Develop and enforce class rules and shared norms, discussing them routinely.
	Create, agree to, and help students understand logical consequences, discussing them frequently and whenever appropriate.

[1] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1): 405–432.