

Social-emotional Learning in Action: A Secondary Teacher of English Shares How It Can Work

Nuru Said

Introducing SEL and its Importance

In most cultures around the world, children are taken to school not only to acquire new knowledge but also to develop collaborative skills. Apart from helping students develop language skills, teachers can also instill social skills in learners in order to prepare them for life after school, where they will interact and work with people from diverse backgrounds. This is where social-emotional learning (SEL) comes in.

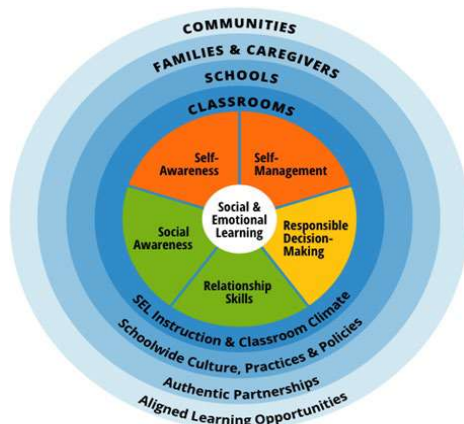
SEL is an inherent part of education and human development. Through SEL, young people and adults are able to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, develop empathy for others, maintain healthy relationships, as well as make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2024).

Different studies have identified various components of SEL. Aguilar and Bridges (2024) explain the five competencies of social-emotional learning as:

- Self-awareness - the ability to understand one's own feelings, thoughts and values and their impact on behavior in different situations
- Self-management - the ability to manage one's own emotions to achieve personal and collective goals
- Social awareness - the ability to empathize with others, including those from different backgrounds and cultures
- Relationship skills - the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships by working collaboratively with others
- Responsible decision making - the ability to make constructive choices by evaluating the benefits and consequences of different actions for personal and collective well-being

Figure 1

SEL Framework based on CASEL (2024)



According to Jones and Doolittle (2017), SEL increases a learner's ability to integrate thinking, emotions, and behavior in ways that lead to positive school and life outcomes. In addition, SEL also helps learners to acquire the ability to monitor behaviors, control emotions, establish and maintain positive relationships, as well as regulate learning (Ahmed et al., 2020). SEL does not have to be taught as a subject on its own. Different SEL strategies and elements can be integrated in all classes seemingly, especially in English language teaching (ELT). The SEL components can be taught while the teacher is working on grammar, reading, listening, speaking and writing activities. The activities can be designed in a way that they teach an aspect of language and social and emotional skills at the same time.

Practical Applications

Here are some suggestions about how the components of SEL can be applied in the ELT classroom:

Self-awareness

SEL enables learners to express their feelings. In a grammar lesson, the teacher can teach students vocabulary, as shown in Figure 2, for expressing feelings, and can ask learners to use them to express their feelings in different situations.

Figure 2

Vocabulary for Expressing Feelings



There are also a myriad of writing activities that students can be exposed to so as to learn to recognize and process their feelings and thoughts. Essays on topics like *My Future Career* and *What Makes Me Happy* can help students examine their emotions, abilities, and goals. Journaling is also a great way for students to share their feelings at the end of the day. Reading and storytelling sessions can be followed up with questions like:

- If you were in the character's position, how would you feel?
- How would you like someone to treat you in such a situation?

Allow a moment for self-reflection in the lesson so that students can examine their feelings and thoughts.

Self-management

Role-playing is an effective activity when teaching etiquette in a listening and speaking lesson. For example, when teaching telephone conversation skills, students can be guided in how to work through their emotions when having a difficult conversation by deep breathing or counting. Keeping journals also goes a long way in allowing students an opportunity to manage their thoughts.

Social awareness

Written passages can expose students to an array of topics; hence students can discuss and debate about local and global issues from different perspectives. Passages can be rich sources of vocabulary that help learners expand their word banks. They are also vital in teaching students' comprehension skills. Alternatively, a teacher can have students write essays on social issues within the school or in the community. Then, students can read their peers' essays to view issues from other points of view.

Relationship Skills

Using group projects to teach conversational skills can help build relationship skills. As students practice conversational skills, their social skills are also developed in the process. Another idea for a group activity would be to have students work together after reading a story. You can ask students to assume the roles of different characters and provide discussion questions like:

- How can you describe the character's relationship with other characters?
- If you were in the character's shoes, how would you have treated the other character?

Group activities even in a grammar lesson allow students to practice social skills, such as respect and the 4 Cs: communication, collaboration, creative thinking, and creativity. For example, learners can collaborate to write a cohesive paragraph improving on their ability to relate with people from different backgrounds, while focusing on the skills from the grammar lesson. In Figure 3, see a group of students working collaboratively.

Figure 3

A Group of Students Working Collaboratively



Responsible Decision Making

Engage learners in a storytelling session, where they have an opportunity to share a story with a dilemma with their peers. Then, allow for time to discuss the story so that the students can examine the choices made in the story by characters, and can share their reactions, reflections, and choices they would make in the same situation.

Alternatively, after reading a story with a dilemma (from a novel, newspaper, magazine, or online material), engage students in a discussion about the characters' decisions, and allow learners to express the choices, had they been in similar circumstances.

Conclusion

Students can experience many issues inside and outside of school. As a result, teachers can work on cognitive development alongside social and emotional needs. The activities presented in this article are not cast in stone. Feel free to edit them to suit the context, needs, and interests of your learners. Let us embrace social-emotional learning so as to promote peaceful co-existence in our classrooms, in the school community, and society at large.

References

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