

How I Teach Social-Emotional Learning

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Why I Teach Social-Emotional Learning

My name is Rebecca Fennel. I have taught grades second through fifth for eight years. I have taught all of the core subjects throughout the years, but have found something else to be even more important - social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL is foundational and enables students to develop the tools they need to be successful - not just in the classroom, but outside of it, as well. As students work through projects, learn about history, play together on the playground and complete tasks independently, it helps them to know and use the “best practices” for doing so. Students can understand and master the academic content, but without learning and using skills such as time management or working with others they may still fail. I have enjoyed teaching these skills because it has helped create a happier, [healthier classroom community](#) for me and my students.

This e-book will introduce you to four best practices I have discovered and implemented that make teaching social-emotional learning successful:

- Socratic seminars
- Morning meeting
- Project-based learning
- Social Studies integration

But first, a little bit of background on SEL and why it’s an important component of academic instruction.

What is Social-Emotional Learning?

Simply put, social-emotional learning (SEL) is instruction aimed at helping students learn healthy skills and strategies for navigating through life, handling issues and challenges as they arise, and developing positive and proactive attitudes towards others. Research indicates that the inclusion of SEL instruction in traditional academic subjects improves outcomes and economic mobility. .

According to the SEL standards organization Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), there are five key components of SEL:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Responsible decision-making
- Relationship skills
- Social awareness

Best Practice #1

(CASEL has an excellent graphical representation of these elements, plus more description, at their [website](#).)

Why is Social-Emotional Learning important?

SEL is just as important to student development as academics. Students have missed out on a lot of this skill-building due to a lack of focus on it at the younger grade levels, as well as the pervasive influence of technology. Learning to self-regulate and work with others (in addition to mastering the content we teach them) are critical skills. Without the tools needed to set and accomplish goals, complete group work, and persist in difficult situations, our students are only getting part of what they need to be successful both in and out of the classroom.

Socratic Seminars

Description

Socratic seminars are an excellent way to incorporate a number of important SEL skills. Socratic seminars are a way of discussing any type of text - a poem, short story, passage, quote or even a visual - as a small group or whole class. Students sit in a large circle with the teacher as "facilitator." Everyone faces each other and the facilitator guides the discussion with questions. Questions only! The facilitator is required to sit without commenting or making expressions of "approval." It is important that students feel safe to interact and discuss freely and openly without judgment. Learn more about organizing a Socratic seminar with this [TeacherVision resource](#).

Socratic seminars give students the opportunity to practice a few key SEL skills - primarily self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills. In this exercise, you are giving students practice at fostering both their individual and group communication skills - how they handle the opportunity to do so can be used as a key benchmark of the exercise. So, while you are technically not supposed to chime in or direct the flow of the conversation, you can and should take some opportunities to provide summative assessment of the SEL components you want to focus on.

Directions

1. Select a text and have students read it once on their own and make notes.
2. Come together in a large circle so everyone is facing one another.
3. Read the text again as a group. (Students should bring a copy of the text with them for reference.)
4. The facilitator opens the discussion with a round robin question that each student will respond to with a one- or two-word answer.

Best Practice #1

5. The facilitator then asks students to explain the word they chose. Students respond without raising their hands, but while being considerate of others. (This will take practice!)
6. Once the discussion begins to die down, the facilitator begins asking the rest of the planned questions to guide the discussion, allowing time for students to respond to each as needed.
7. Students return to their seats and complete a reflection form.

Tips for a Successful Socratic Seminar

- Display the Rules and Agree/Disagree statements (listed below) on a poster and keep it in view during the seminar.
- Ask students who are speaking too much to put a fist over their heart temporarily. Explain to students beforehand this is just a simple reminder to let others speak.
- After doing a couple of the seminars, if there are students who are really struggling to speak you may want to give them two to three popsicle sticks as an incentive for speaking up. Tell them their goal is to put them on the floor after speaking.
- Display sentence starters to help students learn to disagree or debate respectfully.
- Remind students to refer to the text to help support their responses.

Rules of the Socratic Seminar

1. You do not raise your hand - you simply wait for your turn to speak.
2. Be respectful. If two people begin speaking at the same time - take turns.
3. Judgment-free zone. Please do not make faces or inappropriate comments to downplay someone's response.
4. Ask for clarification if you need it.
5. Refer to the text to help make your points.
6. Be considerate, thoughtful, and try your best!

Best Practice #1

Agree/Disagree Statements:

1. I agree with _____
because_____.
2. I disagree with _____
because_____.
3. I see what you are saying _____, but here
is another side to that...

Example for Socratic Seminar

Use the classic Aesop's fable "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" as the reading passage. (Reprinted from Infoplease). This reading passage should stimulate an easy conversation. Applying the moral of the story, particularly as it relates to the classroom and to students' lives outside it, will give your students the opportunity to discuss (and hopefully practice) self-management - the story is a practically ironclad example of what happens when poor self-management, lack of empathy, and unchecked impulse control factor into a social situation.

The Boy Who Cried Wolf

A Shepherd's Boy was tending his flock near a village, and thought it would be great fun to hoax the villagers by pretending that a Wolf was attacking the sheep: so he shouted out, "Wolf! wolf!" and when the people came running up he laughed at them for their pains. He did this more than once, and every time the villagers found they had been hoaxed, for there was no Wolf at all. At last a Wolf really did come, and the Boy cried, "Wolf! wolf!" as loud as he could: but the people were so used to hearing him call that they took no notice of his cries for help. And so the Wolf had it all his own way, and killed off sheep after sheep at his leisure.

Round Robin Question: What is one word you would use to describe the Shepherd boy besides "liar?"

- Why did you choose that word?
- What lesson can be learned from this story?
- How could you apply this story's lesson to this classroom?
- How could you apply the story's lesson to the real world?
- What could the Shepherd boy have done differently?
- What other take-aways do you have from this story?

Best Practice #1

Student Reflection

Name: _____

I spoke more than once during the seminar	Yes	No
I was respectful of others during the entire seminar.	Yes	No
I listened to others	Yes	No
I used examples from the text to support my thoughts	Yes	No
I came prepared for the seminar.	Yes	No

What I think I did well during the seminar:

What I think I need to work on for the next seminar:

Best Practice #2

Social Studies Integration

Description

This best practice for teaching social-emotional learning is something you can easily do throughout the year during your social studies time. Social studies topics lend themselves readily to SEL due to the easy association of SEL concepts with societal and historical scenarios. I often take five minutes at the end of a social studies lesson to reflect about the SEL concepts that can be found in social topics, discuss real world issues and how to function properly as part of a community.

Here are some examples of ways to integrate SEL with different social studies topics:

- Build an activity around cataloging and describing the personal characteristics of a figure of historical importance who is part of the topic you are studying. For example, during Black History Month, have students profile important civil rights leaders for qualities like persistence, empathy, initiative, self-awareness, service mentality, etc., by creating “baseball cards” that feature a photo or drawing of the person and a list of their SEL “stats” on the back.
- View a video that describes or enhances a particular event or moment in history. Break students into small groups and ask them to describe, with an example, how the conflict at the heart of the event parallels conflicts they might experience in their lives. Ask each group to come up with SEL-based solutions to their conflicts (i.e. better communication, problem-solving, understanding, self-management, etc.).
- Complete a socratic seminar using a historical speech from the time/event being studied.
- Have students review a lesson using a graphic organizer that features the five components of SEL. (This could be done with videos and images also.)

Best Practice Example

The example given on the next page is a “Bill of Rights Project.” This is an excellent way for students to collaborate, make decisions, and discuss social issues all while diving deeper into the source document.

Best Practice #2

Bill of Rights Project

Read the [Constitution and the Bill of Rights](#). You will decide which Amendment you think is the MOST important. Which protects personal and social freedoms the most? Fill in the graphic organizer below to help you explain your thinking. You will be put into groups based on your thinking and prepare for a debate. Make sure you fully understand the other Amendments in order to support your thinking.

Amendment- Write it directly from the Constitution.	
Write the Amendment in your own words. What does this Bill mean to you?	
First reason it is most important	
Second reason	
Third reason	
Closing argument (Restate your opinion and reasons)	

Best Practice #3

Morning Meeting

Description

Morning meeting has become commonplace in classrooms across the country, for good reason! Morning meetings allow students to interact without content and freely discuss their feelings, thoughts and plans. In this section I will describe how I conduct my morning meetings each morning with a strong focus on the components of SEL. It's easy to reinforce these skills/concepts with students as you're conducting morning meeting. Want more tips on how to run a morning meeting? See this [TeacherVision resource](#).

Morning Meeting Schedule:

- Students come to the carpet in a large circle. We wait for everyone to join and to be comfortable. I play joyful music during this transition and often have a silly dance or way to walk to the carpet. (SEL skills/concepts to reinforce: Self-management, courtesy.)
- I begin with a greeting and students continue around the circle greeting one another. This could be a song, a simple handshake or class "secret" handshake. No matter the greeting, I always made sure students say each others' names. This is important in making students feel acknowledged each morning. (SEL skills/concepts to reinforce: Self-awareness, community, kindness.)
- I take this time to give any reminders, discuss the schedule for that day or any changes. This allows students to adjust and set their minds for the day ahead. (SEL skills/concepts to reinforce: Responsibility, goal-setting, initiative.)
- As a class we follow a schedule to have three to four students share each day. This way students always have a turn and could prepare for their day in any way they'd like. This is their time to tell the class any exciting news, worries, stories or whatever they please! They get to express themselves and feel belonging. Some students prepare ahead and bring in something from home they'd like to share too. (SEL skills/concepts to reinforce: Passion, initiative, communication.)
- After each student has shared, they would allow for two questions or comments. This helps with social interaction, listening and reacting respectfully. (SEL skills/concepts to reinforce: Communication, self-management, critical thinking.)
- We then pull out our "compliment bucket" and share an anonymous compliment that a student has submitted about someone in the classroom. We would give "snaps" or "positive energy" to that student. (SEL skill/concepts to reinforce: Empathy, community, positive mindset.)
- We conclude the morning meeting with a dance or yoga. This movement allows students to give their bodies positive energy and gets them ready to focus for the day. (SEL skills/concepts to reinforce: Mindfulness, balance, openness.)

Best Practice #4

Project Based Learning

Description

Project Based Learning (PBL) is an excellent tool for integrating SEL into nearly any content area. This best practice allows students to investigate and dig deeper into a topic by doing the work themselves. PBL often incorporates a challenge or situation that students must work together on to solve. It usually incorporates collaboration, discussion, reflection, inquiry, creativity and decision making.

You provide the supplies, resources and the driving questions. Students are usually in groups or pairs, which promotes the collaboration aspect of SEL.

An important part of PBL is the opportunity for students to make mistakes, discuss the error, and make corrections. This allows for great exercise of decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills by individual students and the group as a whole.

You can find an entire library of SEL-oriented projects on [TeacherVision](#).

My Favorite Assignment

My favorite assignment is a PBL I do every year that is directly aligned with SEL concepts. I task students with determining a social cause they find important and think the class should then get involved in.

Driving Questions:

- What is a social/charitable cause you think our class should and can get involved with?
- How will we as a class be involved? Will it actually be do-able?
- What are the reasons this cause is important to you? To society?
- Is there an organization we will be helping or will you be creating your own?

Students may work independently, in pairs or in a small group.

Research may be performed online, by visiting locations, making phone calls, or conducting in-person interviews.

The end product: A presentation designed to persuade the class that the chosen social issue or charitable cause is the one we should get involved with.

Rubric for Presentation

Student clearly states the charitable cause and/or social issue they want to become involved with. Student states three reasons as to why it is important to them.	20 Points
Student describes how the class could easily become involved and what it would do for this cause.	20 Points
Student prepared a presentation is that is creative, clear and edited.	20 Points
Student(s) deliver their presentation and add to the information provided on the slide.	20 Points
Student(s) make changes based on peer reflection or self-reflection.	20 Points



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