Chapter 12

Social and emotional learning

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Applications

Introduction
The Australian community expects primary school students from the early years through to the end of primary schooling to achieve social outcomes as well as academic success. In order to meet this expectation, teachers are being pressed to ensure that their students experience social connectedness and emotional wellbeing as part of adjusting to the classroom, participating in learning and acquiring a sense of personal competence and self-management. Engaging with others, attending to task and regulating self are pivotal skills threading throughout daily classroom activities and routines. Teachers need to adopt a more strategic process for responding to the social and emotional challenges faced by some students in mastering the developmental tasks related to this engage–attend–regulate skill set. Assessing classroom difficulties in social and emotional learning provides a necessary starting point to identify adjustments across the classroom curriculum and embed these adjustments into the plan–implement–evaluate teaching cycle. The focus of this chapter is to bring together existing knowledge and tools that promote social and emotional learning in general and the pivotal skill set in particular, so that teachers can apply them in their everyday practice.

Framing social and emotional learning
Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a broad domain of learning that develops throughout life, and skills in this domain progressively support a positive state of wellbeing, mental health and resourcefulness related to resilience. As a domain, SEL draws on complex cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes that, with experience over time, strengthen students’ capacity to engage with, attend to and manage themselves in their expanding personal and social worlds of learning, living, work and leisure. Because of its multifaceted nature, the SEL domain can be viewed from a number of perspectives (Osher et al., 2010). For example, this domain has been represented in the literature as a clustering of competencies, elements, skills, dimensions and dispositions.

For many years, the SEL framework put forward by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been recognised internationally as the gold standard. Table 12.1 shows how the CASEL framing of SEL around five core groups of competencies (Zins et al., 2004) has been adopted and adapted for international goal-setting (UNESCO, 2013) and for various Australian purposes such as personal and social capability (PSC) within the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2013) and allied resource materials (e.g. Davidson, 2011; Roffey, 2011). Widespread consensus about the CASEL competencies is evident among these varied but related approaches to and conceptualisations of SEL.
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<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Emotional awareness</td>
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<td>Emotional self-management</td>
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<td>Self-confidence and self-efficacy</td>
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<td>Self-management</td>
<td>Self-management</td>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>Emotional skills</td>
<td>Emotional self-management</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Social awareness</td>
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<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Shared humanity</td>
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<td>Situational skills</td>
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<td>(empathy)</td>
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<td>Relationship-management</td>
<td>Social management</td>
<td>Social relationships</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Socially proactive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conflict-resolution</td>
<td>Conflict and confrontation</td>
<td>(e.g. friendships)</td>
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<td>Repair and restoration</td>
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<td>Responsible decision-making</td>
<td>Moral, civic and ethical values</td>
<td>Ethics and integrity</td>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Socially reactive (e.g. teasing, bullying)</td>
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<td>Spirituality</td>
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Note: Darker shading denotes pivotal skills in attending, engaging and regulating.
Table 12.2 contrasts the way in which self-management is documented in Australia relative to the context-free descriptors used in Illinois. In the earliest standards from the Illinois State Board of Education (2014), the kinds of knowledge and related skills classified by CASEL were identified for all environments and sequenced across grade levels. By comparison, the ACARA (2013) skills for personal and social capability feature skills more relevant to the classroom context. For example, ‘demonstrate control of impulsive behaviour’ (Illinois) is reframed and expressed as ‘follow class routines to assist learning’ (ACARA). It is likely that Australian teachers will find these content descriptions helpful in assessing students and SEL planning for their classes.

This ACARA mapping for student capacity-building in SEL elements acknowledges the importance of the ecological context for classroom learning and the need to build student knowledge and skills relevant to its social, physical and instructional interfaces. For each student, classroom success depends on the gradual building of knowledge and skills for each interface and the added power that results from the integration of skills at a blended interface. Regardless of year level and classroom context, skill integration means that students can combine confidence in learning with genuine cooperation with the teacher in the company of peers (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 405). As a student progressively learns to self-manage in more complicated and sophisticated ways, they will encounter aspects of classroom ecology that require learning how to interact better with others and how to acquire more persistence with classroom tasks.

Table 12.2 shows the characterisation of progressive levels of self-management in the context of Australian classrooms in contrast with a contextual progression depicted in the Illinois standard for self-management. Pause and reflect on how the Australian self-management tasks have been mapped progressively across the six age levels for expressing emotions, following routines, working independently and seeking help from others, and approaching situations confidently. First consider the specific social and emotional development and classroom learning that takes place within each year level. Then track the consequently elaborated skill acquisition that unfolds from one year level to the next.

The engage–attend–regulate set of pivotal skills provides the underlying foundation for student capacity-building in self-management and in the other SEL elements of the ACARA capabilities framework. Engaging with others addresses the ever-continuing demand for social learning to strengthen relationships and deal with conflict. Attending to task addresses the relentless push to improve concentration, organisation, and planning. Self-regulation addresses the long-term aspiration to gain personal autonomy and independence. This triad of skills overlap and work in concert. Together, their acquisition scaffolds pro-social behaviour change at any age level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
<th>Level 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typically by end of Foundation Year (Prep)</td>
<td>Typically by end of Year 2</td>
<td>Typically by end of Year 4</td>
<td>Typically by end of Year 6</td>
<td>Typically by end of Year 8</td>
<td>Typically by end of Year 10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**EXPRESS EMOTIONS APPROPRIATELY**

- Express their emotions constructively in interactions with others
- Describe ways to express emotions to show awareness of the feelings and needs of others
- Identify and describe strategies to manage and moderate emotions in increasingly unfamiliar situations
- Explain the influence of emotions on behaviour, learning and relationships
- Forecast the consequences of expressing emotions inappropriately and devise measures to regulate behaviour
- Consider control and justify their emotional responses in expressing opinions, beliefs, values, questions and choices

**DEVELOP SELF-DISCIPLINE AND SET GOALS**

- Follow class routines to assist learning
- Set goals in learning and personal organisation by completing tasks within a given time
- Explain the value of self-discipline and goal-setting in helping them to learn
- Analyse factors that influence ability to self-regulate; devise and apply strategies to monitor own behaviour and set realistic learning goals
- Select, use and analyse strategies that assist in regulating behaviour and achieving personal and learning goals
- Critically analyse self-discipline strategies and personal goals and consider application in social and work-related contexts

**WORK INDEPENDENTLY AND SHOW INITIATIVE**

- Attempt tasks independently and identify when and from whom help can be sought
- Work independently on routine tasks and experiment with strategies to complete other tasks where appropriate
- Consider, select, and adopt a range of strategies for working independently and taking initiative
- Assess the value of working independently and taking initiative to do so where appropriate
- Critique effectiveness in working independently by identifying enablers and barriers to achieving goals
- Establish personal priorities, manage resources effectively, and demonstrate initiative to achieve personal goals and learning outcomes

*cont.*
Table 12.2 (cont.)

**BECOME CONFIDENT, RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE**

| Identify situations that feel safe or unsafe, approaching new situations with confidence | Undertake and persist with short tasks, within the limits of personal safety | Persist with tasks when faced with challenges and adapt their approach where first attempts are not successful | Devise strategies and formulate plans to assist in the completion of challenging tasks and the maintenance of personal safety | Assess, adapt and modify personal and safety strategies and plans, and revisit tasks with renewed confidence | Evaluate, rethink and refine approaches to tasks to take account of unexpected or difficult situations and safety considerations |

**ILLINOIS PROFILE OF SELF-MANAGEMENT IN ITS LEARNING STANDARDS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Elementary</th>
<th>Late Elementary</th>
<th>Middle/Junior High</th>
<th>Late High School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IDENTIFY AND MANAGE ONE’S EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR</strong></td>
<td>Recognise and accurately label emotions and how they are linked to behaviour</td>
<td>Describe a range of emotions and the situations that cause them</td>
<td>Analyse factors that create stress or motivate successful performance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrate control of impulsive behaviour</td>
<td>Demonstrate control of impulsive behaviour</td>
<td>Describe and demonstrate ways to express emotions in a socially acceptable manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RECOGNISE PERSONAL QUALITIES AND EXTERNAL SUPPORTS</strong></td>
<td>Identify one’s likes and dislikes, needs and wants, strengths and challenges</td>
<td>Describe personal skills and interests that one wants to develop</td>
<td>Analyse how personal qualities influence choices and successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify family, peer, school and community strengths</td>
<td>Explain how family members, peers, school personnel and community members can support school success and responsible behaviour</td>
<td>Analyse how making use of school and community supports and opportunities can contribute to school and life success</td>
<td>Analyse how positive adult role models and support systems contribute to school and life success</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEMONSTRATE SKILLS RELATED TO ACHIEVING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC GOALS</td>
<td>Describe why school is important in helping students achieve personal goals</td>
<td>Describe the steps in setting and working towards goal achievement</td>
<td>Set a short-term goal and make a plan for achieving it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify goals for academic success and classroom behaviour</td>
<td>Monitor progress on achieving a short-term personal goal</td>
<td>Analyse why one achieved or did not achieve a goal</td>
<td>Apply strategies to overcome obstacles to goal achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applications

Several longitudinal research projects lend credence to the importance of this skill set. For example, three stable dimensions of temperament have been identified in the ongoing Australian Temperament Project (Sanson & Oberklaid, 2013, p. 5). Engaging aligns with sociability and the tendency to approach or avoid new situations and people. Regulating aligns with reactivity and the self-calming of emotional reactions— for example, anger control. Attending aligns with persistence and the self-regulation of attention. Sanson (2013) also states that good social skills, sound relationships with peers and parents, and positive school experiences help anxious and depressed children become more resilient teenagers. In addition, three salient developmental tasks for the schooling years with lifelong consequences have been identified in the extended North American Project Competence study (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). These identified tasks of friendship, academic performance and classroom conduct also resonate with engaging, attending and regulating. Teachers seeking to promote SEL in today’s classrooms need to know how each of their students is positioned in relation to this skill set so that they can embed this knowledge and understanding into their assess-plan-implement-evaluate cycle of lessons and other classroom interactions.

Working through the SEL teaching cycle

The connection between SEL, academic achievement and school adjustment has fostered extensive research, review and resourcing. Relationships with others and with oneself are central to the process of teaching and learning (Thapa et al., 2013). Negative and conflictual relations between teacher and student can affect classroom engagement, and feeling unsafe and unable to take care of oneself in the classroom can damage attachment to the school and to learning. While parents and teachers are always teaching SEL lessons on civic and moral topics as an incidental and implicit part of teacher-student interactions, helping students develop their social and moral sensitivities, character and sense of citizenship is becoming a pro-social concern about universal, formal and explicit SEL education.

In some educational systems and settings, SEL has a schoolwide focus, which is guided by commercial programming packages or curricula (see Box 12.1). Increasingly, formal SEL measures are commercially available in association with mixed media curriculum packages (e.g. the Social Skills Improvement System by Gresham and Elliott; Strong Kids series Pre-K to Grade 12 by Merrell and colleagues). In these circumstances, inbuilt tools are routinely provided to ensure quality of instruction and consistency of approach across the teaching cycle.
Box 12.1 Three recommended SEL resource packages with age-related curriculum across schooling years


Otherwise, decision-making falls upon the individual teacher to sort through the myriad potentially useful SEL resources in order to locate material that reconciles student needs with classroom curriculum (including the personal and social capabilities framework). In these circumstances, time and workload difficulties often lead to teachers 'cherry-picking', and making haphazard decisions when they sample from the hodge-podge of SEL knowledge, tools and strategies (Osher et al., 2010).
Applications

Some explicit and strategic guidelines can be offered on how to systematically thread pivotal skills into daily classroom activities and routines across the teaching cycle. Assessment and planning at the front of this cycle receive particular emphasis, because the decisions that a teacher makes during these early phases are critical to the whole teaching cycle and to SEL outcomes for students.

Assess

Every interaction at school provides opportunities to gather information about student capabilities and the goodness of fit between student SEL skills and the classroom program, which makes assessment a dynamic process that is never really completed: 'Information about what a child can and cannot do provides the fabric for strength-based teaching and learning, and for curriculum content to be broadened or reduced.' (Beamish & Saggers, 2013, p. 246) Assessment therefore enables the teacher to target specific skills for infusion into classroom planning and units of work.

It is important to know every student. To know is to be sensitive to how a student connects thoughts and behaviours to emotions, to recognise individual preferences and favourite things, and to understand the effects of cultural identity and family circumstances on learning. A teacher needs to consider what skills can bring about changes in the child's life, and they need to avoid making assumptions based on school performance, problem behaviour and personality traits and socio-cultural background. Assessment should focus positively on student needs, so that planning can be responsive and solution focused. For example, Roffey (2011) provides a very simple problem-based checklist for assessing students’ engagement in their social world. Questions for rating on a five-point scale include: What does a student view as her/his positive qualities and strengths? Which people support this student at school and at home? Who do this student view as a role model? Which peers positively influence the student?

Checklists are often regarded as teacher-friendly tools to informally gather information about students. A variety of informal and formal tools are freely available on the internet. Not only can teachers use these specific tools; they can draw items or ideas for items from tools to allow them to make personalised measures that target relevant SEL skills for their classroom curriculum. At times, information gained from such prestructured tools needs to be augmented by direct observation of students in the classroom context as they engage in group work, attend to individual work and manage themselves across the day.

Examples of websites for SEL assessment tools include:

- California Department of Education, Desired Results Developmental Profile – Preschool (2010) and Desired Results Developmental Profile – School Age (2009). Locate Self and Social Development domain search using Desired Results Developmental Profile for Preschool or School Age: http://www.cde.ca.gov
• Strong Kids Tests for Grades 3–8. Student self-reports of negative symptoms and positive SEL knowledge about SK curriculum: http://strongkids.uoregon.edu/unitests/strongkids.pdf
• Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Measures for Middle School Youth: http://raikesfoundation.org/Documents/SELT tools.pdf.

Plan
Some interactions in the classroom warrant specific planning to embed SEL goals and strategies into existing units of work and other curriculum documents. From knowing student strengths and reflecting on their individual profiles based on assessment information, the teacher can set goals and determine strategies that suit the class as a whole and foster general wellbeing. This whole-class planning can focus on promoting new skills, consolidating emerging skills or integrating related skills. However, planning of this kind will fall short of meeting the SEL needs of all students. Some students will need more opportunity to practise a skill, while others will need more powerful strategies to learn a skill. These adjustments will not be sufficient for a few students, who will require a more intense program with more extensive supports in order to learn basic SEL skills.

Four practices for effective SEL planning have been recommended by Durlak et al. (2011). The acronym SAFE identifies this suite of practices:
• **Sequenced.** New behaviours and more complicated skills usually need to be broken down into smaller steps and sequentially mastered.
• **Active.** Effective teaching emphasises the importance of active forms of learning.
• **Focused.** Sufficient time and attention needs to be devoted to any task for learning to occur.
• **Explicit.** Clear and specific learning objectives are preferred over general ones.

Commercial packages routinely apply these practices to lessons devoted to selected SEL skills. They tend to break down teaching of a skill into multiple lessons and learning steps; they provide learning activities such as role-play, rehearsal, and discussion in which students actively participate; they allocate finite times for each step and activity within a lesson; and they specify explicit objectives for each lesson. The seminal **Skillstreaming** series developed by Goldstein and maintained by McGinnis provide a comprehensive resource of SEL content, strategies, and assessment ideas across the schooling years. More recent packages have offered a more selective approach that targets the building and integrating of SEL micro-skills. Table 12.3
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shows the use of SAFE practices in relation to an example of lessons for teaching self-management of anger in different packages. While some Australian schools are investing in these packages, many individual teachers are sourcing ideas for SEL planning from assorted websites (see Box 12.2). Ideas within these validated packages should be very helpful to beginning teachers in their SEL planning because they provide goals targeted for particular age-groups, classes, related sequence of skills and strategies for instruction.

Table 12.3 Application of SAFE to commercially available lessons in managing emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAFE PRACTICES</th>
<th>SKILL STREAMING ELEMENTARY</th>
<th>SSIS EARLY ELEMENTARY</th>
<th>STRONG KIDS 3-5 LESSON 4: DEALING WITH ANGER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SKILL 36: SELF-CONTROL (ALTERNATIVE TO AGGRESSION)</td>
<td>Four-step skill: Stop and count to 10 Feel-backwards Think about body feelings Think about choices Act</td>
<td>Four-step skill: Feel Think Talk Do</td>
<td>Four-step skill: Count backwards Make if-then statements Use self-talk Self-evaluate action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence</td>
<td>Model Practise Homework</td>
<td>Model and role-play Discuss video clips Homework</td>
<td>Role-play Activities Homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Extensive coverage of teaching procedures Three pages of skill outline and two practice sessions Link to relaxing skill</td>
<td>Ten pages on three lessons Timed sequence of activities and scripts: Tell (4 mins), Show (4 mins), Do (7 mins), Monitor (2 mins), Practise (4 mins), Generalise (4 mins)</td>
<td>Sixteen pages of scripts and transparencies on four activities: Define anger, Describe control skills, Apply to negative and positive situations and Generalise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>Use skill to identify feeling when angry or upset Sometimes delay dealing with problem when upset</td>
<td>Control temper in conflict with peers Identify what triggers anger and use anger-reduction skills</td>
<td>Understand anger (Identify triggers, Think about situation and Recognise emotion) Manage aggression (Choose action, Act, &amp; Review consequence)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Implement and evaluate

Many student–teacher interactions can strengthen SEL skills when they are based on sound planning and are part of the everyday implementation and evaluation of units of work. The teacher who devotes sufficient time and attention to child-focused and active learning experiences is implementing SAFE practice recommendations, and their classroom evaluations should include evidence of SEL outcomes. The teacher who makes strategic use of peer modelling and social games not only promotes class connectedness and feelings of belonging to the school community, but also inhibits bullying and other negative behaviours. Evaluation of these interactions involves monitoring student use of skills in appropriate ways and reassessment of these skills via either previously package-based checklists or teacher-designed measures. This evaluation enables the teacher to view skill changes in the whole classroom and in
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individual students. Information about these changes can be used in reporting. It also provides the basis for a new plan-implement-evaluate teaching cycle. This ongoing cycling of SEL capacity-building needs to continue within each year and across the schooling years because SEL, by its nature, requires a long-term commitment to a process of teaching and learning over time and settings (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010; Osher et al., 2010).

Summary

SEL is a fundamental part of curriculum because it prepares students to work, live and participate in an increasingly complex and changing world.

- SEL is connected to academic achievement, school adjustment, and social outcomes.
- Engaging with others, attending to task and regulating self are pivotal skills that warrant intentional threading throughout daily classroom activities and routines.
- This skill set needs to be embedded into the assess-plan-implement-evaluate teaching cycle.
- Knowing every student and their personal and social capabilities in the classroom is the first step in the cycle.
- SAFE practices—sequenced, active, focused and explicit—are recommended for planning and implementation.
- Evaluation of SEL outcomes provides information for reporting and feedback for the next teaching cycle.

Questions

12.1 What are the CASEL five core competencies, and how do they work together?
12.2 Why are the three pivotal SEL skills engaging with others, attending to task and regulating self?
12.3 How do you get to know an individual student and assess that student’s capabilities, preferences and vulnerabilities?
12.4 Why should teachers invest time and effort into thinking about SEL when lesson planning?

References


Chapter 12 Social and emotional learning


