

# Social Emotional learning through Art Education

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With today's emphasis in academic performance in education and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 funding, focus, and support of arts education is hugely deficient. Intellectual content and standardized tests dominate classrooms and student's emotional and social education is neglected. School violence, mass shootings, and bullying (to the point of suicide) are more prevalent and the causes of these events are not being addressed. In education children's intellect is focused on and other needs children have like social skills and emotional intelligence are neglected. Using artistic expression as a vehicle for self-development facilitates the psychological, emotional, and social development of children.

Neuroscience and research on the brain and its neuroplasticity document that environmental factors and experiences change brain function and structure. Therefore children's brains are constantly being molded and shaped by experience both positive and negative. The prefrontal cortex is a convergence zone for affect and cognition; negative emotions interfere with prefrontal cognitive function (Davidson, 2010). Negative experiences and lack of skills to identify and self-manage emotions affect a student's ability to learn. Research shows students who have had a negative experience such as bullying have been able to recover from the experience more quickly when educated in SEL methods (Davidson, 2010). The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child in 2007 synthesized research on early childhood development indicating emotional well being and social competence provide a strong foundation for brain development and cognitive abilities. Well-developed social and emotional abilities and skills learned as children affect how individuals function later in life in the workplace and personal situations (Brenner, Chen, and Mindness, 2008). As educators we must promote positive brain changes by cultivating healthy social and emotional learning (SEL). Skills of emotion regulation and social adaptation taught through social-emotional learning have been documented as effecting overall learning and shown gains in raised student test scores and intellectual development (Davidson, 2010).

Arts-based techniques and education used in the classroom setting have proven beneficial in shaping intellectual and emotional development (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001). Art education engages competencies that affect children's relationships with their peers, teachers, or family (Horowitz and Dempsey, 2002). Improved communication, emotional management, and understanding of self and others can be addressed through SEL techniques. Studies have shown that attitude towards school and self (Rosal, McCulloch-Visliser, and Neese, 1997), emotional understanding and anger management (Bush, 1997), and academic performance can be improved through art education (Mynarikova, 2012).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) produced a guide of effective social and emotional learning programs and evaluated multiple high-quality evidence-based programs in 2013 for preschool and elementary school grades. CASEL's mission is to make social and emotional learning an integral part of education from preschool through high school (CASEL, 2013). SEL promotes positive relationships between students, teachers, school, family and community. Multiple sources agree that SEL should be taught for the entirety of schooling from preschool through graduation.

SEL are a set of skills that students are taught in order to become better students and prepared them for life and being part of a community. Five interrelated sets of cognitive,

affective, and behavioral competences are defined by CASEL as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The goals of SEL involve processes of developing these social and emotional competencies. Objectives in SEL are defined by CASEL as

Based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful; social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker; many different key risky behaviors (e.g. drug use, violence, bullying and dropout) can be prevented or reduced when multi-year, integrated efforts develop students' social and emotional skills (CASEL, 2013 p.9).

The SEL behavioral competency of self-awareness is defined by the ability to recognize emotions and thoughts that influence a student's behavior and to know one's own strengths and limitations. Self-awareness also involves a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism. The second competency self-management is the ability to manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations such as stress, impulse control, motivating oneself, and working towards goals both personal and academic. The social awareness competency is the ability to take on the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social norms and ethical behaviors, and realize sources of support in family, school, and community. Relationship skill competency is the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships that are rewarding with individuals or groups. These skills include communicating clearly and actively listening, cooperating, sharing, resisting inappropriate social or peer pressure, respectfully disagreeing or the ability to do deal with conflict respectfully, and seeking and offering help. Lastly the responsible decision-making competency involves evaluating and making respectful and constructive choices about personal behavior, social interactions considering ethical and social standards, safety, and evaluation of consequences of various actions and effects of those decisions and the well-being of self and others (CASEL, 2013).

These skills when taught in a whole school setting improve standardized test scores and prepare children to become better students with less behavioral interruptions, allow relationships to flourish in and out of school, promote community involvement, prepare children for the workforce and to become more socially conscious and engaged as adults. SEL programs help teachers move from the often-reactive approach to classroom management and disruptive students to a more proactive approach and shared responsibility for children's social-emotional well-being and health (Brenner, Chen, and Mindness, 2008). Educators, parents, and policy makers recognize SEL competencies are skills that can be taught, that change the brain, and are necessary for effective life functioning. Extensive research demonstrates school-based SEL programs can promote and enhance students' connection to school, positive behavior, and academic achievement (Durlak et. al., 2011).

## References

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## Social and emotional learning actual action plan

Time period: Four weeks

Grade: High school

Asset-based community mural service learning lesson.

Overarching “essential” question:

1. What assets in the community can be utilized and promoted in creation of a mural to enhance sense of community?
2. What is important to a community?

Lesson description:

Students will learn, through interviewing community members, what assets they believe the community has and should celebrate. By working on communication and listening skills students will collectively decide on what elements should be celebrated through depiction in the community mural. Students will design what they believe the mural should entail and critique and voting will take place to pick the final design to be executed. Through this social service learning students will learn to serve others. This explorative and reciprocally collaborative mural project will have emotional challenges that students will need to work through in order to successfully execute the mural. Self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making competencies of social emotional learning will be employed throughout the community mural project.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of community, communication, collaboration, effective design choices, large scale painting execution, and community service.