



# Examples of Social and Emotional Learning in Elementary English Language Arts Instruction

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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, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills, this significantly increases academic achievement, improves attitudes and behaviors, decreases negative behaviors, and reduces emotional distress.<sup>1</sup> 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> Grade)

Self-Awareness	
<b>Lessons/ Activities</b>	Provide vocabulary words for feelings, (e.g., happy, mad, sad, excited, bored).
	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 a new kitten or puppy?,” “How would you feel if your pet was sick?,” “How would you feel if your friend didn’t invite you to their birthday party?”).
	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 stories 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 draw a picture or write simple sentences in their journals) to describe how they handled those situations.
	Use stories and books 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 an art project or to describe in simple words or sentences in a journal activity.
	Have students complete a project to identify their own personal interests or strengths (e.g., draw a picture or write brief answers on a worksheet to share with a caregiver at home or in peer pair share).
<b>Teaching Practices</b>	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 story. Can you tell me what about this is making you feel so energized/motivated/happy?,” “I can tell you’re really proud of how you did on this 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 stories or poems they prefer. Also ask students why they like to read the types of materials they identified. “Why do you think you liked this story especially?,” “Why do you think you like reading these kinds of books?”

	Routinely tell students authentic reasons why you as their teacher feel happy/optimistic for them and their future.
	Create class roles and responsibilities that emphasize individual strengths, areas to improve, and personal and group goals. For example, students might be assigned the roles of cleaning the white board, arranging chairs, or displaying student work.
	Establish shared classroom rules and expectations and consequences so that students can see the impact of their own actions and behaviors on outcomes.
	Create group 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.

<b>Self-Management</b>	
<b>Lessons/Activities</b>	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.
	Have students brainstorm ways to motivate themselves.
	Lead discussions about positive ways we can express our feelings (e.g., talking to an adult or friend, putting our feelings into words, drawing a picture about how we feel, showing our feelings through dance).
	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 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.
	Create classroom goals (e.g., keep the class neater) and monitor progress over the course of several weeks.
	During a lesson talk about how you motivate yourself—to keep yourself going—when you might want to give up.
	Lead a discussion that encourages students to reflect on barriers they may encounter when completing an assignment (e.g., finding a computer) and help them think about ways they can overcome them, including how to approach others for help, e.g., asking the teacher for help.

	Use a story to discuss how one or more characters kept trying when they wanted to give up.
<b>Teaching Practices</b>	Routinely practice self-management techniques as a regular part of the school day (e.g., start class with a deep breathing exercise).
	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 waited your turn just now. I know you were excited, but I saw you cross your arms so that you would keep your hands to yourself, and 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 drawing a picture 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., a peace corner).
	Routinely encourage students to save a desired activity or experience (e.g., playing 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 or story – 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 books or computers).
	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, a powerful strategy that promotes academic growth and should be an instructional routine as they move to grades 4-12.
	Routinely notice and discuss with students when they are being perseverant.
	Routinely ask students who might be able to help them in various situations. 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.”).

## Social Awareness

### Lessons/Activities

Lead a discussion about taking the different perspective of characters in stories, identifying their feelings and thoughts.

Talk about how characters in stories showed respect for others.

Ask students to draw a picture (or ask them to respond with short answers on a worksheet) to show 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 ask students to talk about the kinds of stories, poems, or books 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.

Routinely discuss how we know the way characters in stories feel. Routinely ask how characters in stories feel.

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 stories and act out how those individuals were feeling and how it affected their behavior.

When there is a difference of opinion among students, allow them to reflect on how they are feeling (drawing a picture or writing a simple sentence) 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 stories by authors from many different cultures and for 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. Be careful not to put overly dominant/aggressive children in small groups with overly shy/timid children.
	Morning meetings can be used to involve students in sharing and recognizing others who 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 books and stories who contributed to their communities. List their contributions and ways that 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, or when others are respectful or supportive of them.
	Ask routine questions throughout the day to draw attention to how students' behavior is affecting those around them.
	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.
	Model and routinely promote a school norm of treating others the way you would want to be treated.

<b>Relationship Skills</b>	
<b>Lessons/ Activities</b>	Teach lessons to develop speaking and listening skills (e.g., 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.
	Teach lessons to develop listening, including nonverbal behavioral to show you are listening
	Teach lessons on how to say thank you and receive help well.
	Use stories as an opportunity to teach students a lesson or lessons on how to resolve conflicts peacefully.
	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,

<b>Teaching Practices</b>	social, and assertiveness skills. Be very intentional when creating groups to balance students, so that there are natural leaders who can inspire the others they are working with. Be careful not to put overly intimidating/aggressive children on the same teams with overly shy/timid children, and continually monitor to ensure that teams are always working together in positive ways.
	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 morning 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

<b>Responsible Decision-Making</b>	
<b>Lessons/Activities</b>	Teach students a simple formula for making good decisions anytime they face a choice (e.g., stop, calm down, identify the choice to be made, consider the options, make a choice and do it, how did it go?).
	Ask students to apply the decision-making formula to problems characters face in books or stories.
	Walk through the steps of problem-solving in response to situations in stories.



<b>Teaching Practices</b>	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 problem or moral situations from literature and examine other alternatives and 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.