

UDL & SEL: The CASEL Core Competencies

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How do we weave in social and emotional learning throughout our learning day?

So, when I talk to educators and come alongside and assist them, we really look at their lesson design and think, how can we incorporate CASEL's five core competencies that will support social and emotional learning all day long? So it's not just a three-minute lesson, but we are strategically, like it says in the framework, helping students understand how to cope and how to become self-aware of their emotions.

So, the first CASEL five core competency is self-awareness. So how can we, as educators, help students see what Dr. Dan Siegel talks about?

Name it, so to identify their feelings. Could you offer a check-in? Some sort of, "Hey, how are you emotionally feeling?"

Yale Mood Meter is a great way to do something like that. I've had teachers who put it in a Google Doc and then students can pick a star and put where they're at, if they so choose. They can take a sticking note and put it up as they walk in. Some sort of check-in with your students.

Now in UDL, we don't just wanna offer one option. So, could you also allow a student to do a check-in on a Google Form that may be more autonomous, where maybe people aren't seeing how they're feeling that day? Could there be some sort of pair deck that they engage in, some sort of welcoming activity where you know from the onset, this is where my students are coming into my classroom. That's going to build what we call, or what CASEL calls self-awareness. Processing how you're feeling, but also examining how your emotions and identities may impact all those around you, okay?

Second core competency is self-management. So once students name it, we have to help them tame it, right? We wanna help them manage it. Because emotions are indicators. They can't be dictators and we have to help our students understand that. So when we think about self-management, once they're aware of their emotions and you've given them some time to process that, even in a morning meeting, could they then decide on different coping strategies that would help them self-regulate?

For example, you could offer and teach everyone the 4-7-8 which basically is, you take a cleansing breath and you push out, and then you breathe in for four through your nose, and then you hold for seven seconds, and then you exhale

and breathe out. And then just teaching them breathing is a fabulous way to lower the cortisol level, the adrenaline that's moving in their systems. Either they're coming in like that or throughout the day, our kids get triggered. We need to help them figure out some coping skills.

Now, I'm all about mindfulness, but can I tell you just being trauma-informed and working with educators, doing the breathing is great. Okay? Allow them to breathe in any sort of circumstance. Could they color a page? Could they take a break and walk? Could they get a four ounce drink of water? That tends to calm things down. Could they go to another classroom and deliver a paper and just take some sort of break? We need to allow our students multiple options, remove barriers to we're all doing this because if we're going to practice mindfulness or something where kids have to close their eyes, being trauma-informed tells me this. Closing their eyes is not safe. And so, we need to think about other practices that they can actually do.

Third thing that they could do is we want to build in what's called social awareness. Meaning we want to teach our students and model ourselves understanding others' perspectives and thinking and practicing empathy. So, being socially aware is also understanding that the choices that I make influence other people. So we need to be very cognizant of our choices. That's where self-awareness comes in. And when we're managing them, how are my choices not just affecting me, but how are they affecting other people? And so part of that comes into what I call listening with empathy. And that kind of rolls right into the relationship skills which is the fourth CASEL competency, relationship skills.

So I'm gonna kind of toggle and talk about both, because when we listen to our students with empathy, when we don't come with a judgment, but we end up, first of all, noticing that the student is troubled, okay? Many times, if a student is in a total amygdala hijack, the best thing to do is just pause and take a break. And because their rational brain, their prefrontal cortex isn't online, you're not gonna have a rational conversation. So, you could say, "Hey, let's bookmark this conversation for a later time, and can we meet in an hour?" Or, "Can we meet at your lunchtime or at a break?" Et cetera, et cetera, okay?

So, when you're ready to have that compassionate conversation with passion, or a compassionate conversation, here are a few tips that you can do to build those relationship skills with your students and help your students build that with one another.

First, you gather information. So we're not coming to fix students or fix their problem or solve their problem, okay? Because our students don't need to be fixed. They don't. They come brilliant, they come gifted, they come talented. What they need is they need a listening ear. They need those mirror neurons happening where you're calm, you're engaged, you're listening and then you start gathering information with questions like this. Tell me more about what's going on. What do you need from me right now? Do you need me to offer some solutions or do you just need me to listen? Okay, so we're just gathering information and we're inviting them into the conversation. They don't wanna converse. You'll let it go, okay?

Second, if they're willing to converse, then we need to think about clarifying understanding, meaning this. So I'm hearing you say. So is this what you're saying? Can you help me understand? I think right there is offering students the awareness and self-awareness to say no, that's not really what I was saying. Great. Can you go ahead and clarify? Okay?

Third thing we wanna do, we wanna model active listening. Looking in their eyes, being very present, having the right body posture, folding the arms, not a great body posture, right? We want to model those effective listening skills that I'm here, I see you and I'm here for you. Not to fix you, but just to listen. And then fourth, we need to affirm their feelings. So it sounds to me like you might be feeling. Is that correct? Am I on the right path? Or it looks to me like you may be feeling frustrated and angry. Help me out with that. Is that correct? So, as we're building these relationship skills with our students, we are teaching them how to stop and pause and think through what is triggering them and what's bothering them. And we're affirming them. Again, we're not trying to fix. That right there is helping them with coping skills.

So the last CASEL core competency is responsible decision making. Now, with responsible decision making, when I think about it, people sometimes will ask me, well, which core competency do you think is the most important? And I'm like, I think responsible decision making, in my opinion, encompasses all. Right, because when students, if we are going to engage them in UDL and provide choices and options, don't they need to be self-aware of what they need? Yeah. Don't they need to know how to manage those tools and those resources or how they're communicating with peers? Yes. Don't they need to be socially aware about how their choices and how their interactions, positive and negative, are going to affect the time that they may collaborate or work with other peers on a project? Yes. Don't they build relationship skills as we are fostering collaboration with them to help them sustain that effort, which is part of multiple means of

engagement? Yes. And don't they have to have decision making skills? Yes, they have to learn how to make appropriate decisions, but these are skill sets that children don't come to us with. The brain is underdeveloped. The brain learns with experiences and when we provide these choices and options, and we remove barriers to have students get their brain primed and ready to learn, relationships do that, using CASEL's core competencies will help students do that. We will equip and empower students to self-regulate, to self-monitor, to make decisions, to be strategic, and to be goal-oriented. So, if we wanna support students with getting the brain engaged, we have got to weave in social and emotional learning.

Thank you so much for joining me on this journey. I appreciate the fact that we are all learning together on how to support the whole child, both academically, social and emotionally and behaviorally. And I know, as educators, we have a lot on our plates right now. We really do. But I wanna leave you with this one thought, and it's a quote, it's anonymous. Whoever came up with this brilliant quote. I would love to give them kudos, but I can't. It's this. And I call it the power of one.

Helping one person might not change the world, but it could change the world for that one person.

Thanks for joining me, and go be a change agent in just one child's life that will perpetuate into many more. Thank you.