Social Emotional Learning Through Universal Design: A Framework

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Abstract

Previous academic years allowed for limited or no social integration causing exposure to social experience to be rare and different. With limited opportunity to learn in a classroom and socialize with peers during past academic years, it is imperative that teachers facilitate avenues that allow students to reengage their social emotional health while also experiencing an equitable learning environment. One key way to implement this facilitation is integrating social emotional learning into content learning blocks or academic classes. Social Emotional Learning Standards, when provided by the state, can be integrated into daily or weekly lessons of classroom instruction. These standards aide students in reaching social and life skill goals outlined in the Individual Education Plan. Incorporating such standards universally into all classrooms is key. This article gives teachers and teacher educators a framework, tools, and resources to support social emotional learning through the platform of Universal Design for Learning.

Keywords: social emotional learning, universal design for learning, learning disabilities, lesson planning, graphic organizer

1. Introduction

Social Emotional Learning is defined as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (CASEL, 2021). With the recent charge toward teachers to embed Social Emotional Learning standards with curricular content, it is imperative that all learners have access. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) addresses key components of Social Emotional Learning through the development of five (5) components which make up the foci of the framework (CASEL, 2021). The five components include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. CASEL developed a framework outlining these broad areas along with four domains in which Social Emotional Learning

standards should be implemented. Access for all types of learners, including learners with learning disabilities, can be provided with the Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (UDL) (CAST, 2018). UDL provides three areas of consideration for access when developing lesson plans: Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression (CAST, 2018).

This article provides a framework for implementation of standards through use of the four domains detailed by CASEL (2021) intersected with the three areas of access through UDL. An example of this framework cross sectioning The CASEL 5 with UDL is shared. A sample of the framework with resources included is provided (Figure 6), as well as the framework template for educators to use to organize accessible activities for all learners within all types of classrooms.

2. Understanding Target Areas of Social Emotional Learning

Teacher training involves candidates understanding the scope, sequence, and often the unwrapping of standards (Morgan, et al., 2013). Majority of teachers learn the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010), built around content areas with a specific focus on literacy. Special education teachers are trained to address acquisition of standards through Individual Education Program (IEP) goals built around specific needs of individual students (EHA, 1975). Depending on the learner, IEP goals may be written to address academic, transition, social, or life skills. In the current day, many social skill goals can now be addressed through Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards. Multiple states have developed their own set of SEL Standards (Table 1). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has designed a set of five focus areas which address key components of Social Emotional Learning (2021). These target areas contribute to a national framework, of sorts, in which state standards are designed. The scope of this article uses the CASEL Framework (2021) as part of a newly developed framework for use as a graphic organizer to address SEL Standards within the parameters of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018). CASEL's (2021) focus categories include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The four domains in which CASEL (2021) suggests addressing these focus areas include: Classrooms, through SEL instruction and classroom climate; schools, through schoolwide culture, practices, and policies; families and caregivers, through authentic partnerships; and communities, through aligned learning opportunities.

2.1 Working through Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2018) is structured to allow all individuals access to learning. The three broad areas of UDL include engagement; representation; and action and expression (CAST, 2018). Multiple means of access within these three areas must be provided. When considering multiple means of engagement, the affective networks of the brain are considered, more commonly known as the 'why' of learning. Providing multiple means of representation considers the recognition networks of the brain, or the 'what' of learning. Multiple means of action and expression address the strategic networks of the brain, or what we recognize as the 'how' of learning (CAST, 2018). Teachers can access the tool Key Questions to Consider When Planning Lessons (CAST, 2022) to find questions to consider when planning lessons with UDL in mind.

2.2 Social Emotional Learning through Universal Design

The authors of this publication merged the domains of the CASEL framework (2021) with the three focus areas of the Universal Design for Learning guidelines (CAST, 2018). A graphic organizer was developed to assist teachers in choosing activities to address Social Emotional Learning standards across domains while considering the guidelines of Universal Design (CAST, 2018). A sample of the graphic organizer is provided in Figure 1. The intent is for teachers to use the graphic organizer as a planning tool to map out activities which address social emotional learning standards within designated domains while considering Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018). Using this mapping tool (Figure 1) as a planner also reinforces teachers in the realization that some of what has already been implemented may be addressing social emotional learning across domains. This graphic organizer plays out as a visual guide to activities as well as an organizer of activities to assure all domains are considered, along with all levels of universal design being addressed. The steps to using the graphic organizer follow.

3. Choosing a Standard

It is important to investigate the designated organization that manages state education resources and guidelines. Table 1 shares examples of websites with this information. In many states, this is the state's Department of Education website. Start with this website to search for state-developed social emotional learning standards. For example, the state of Washington's entity, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) houses the Washington State Social Emotional Learning Standards (Nolan, et al., 2019). Once the state standards have been located, it is suggested to bookmark or download and save the document. If this is the initial teaching of SEL in the classroom, starting with the area of self-awareness is ideal. Look for standards within this category and choose one. Using the graphic organizer in Figure 1, fill out the 'Standard' information at the top of the page. It is best practice to label the standard with the coordinating standard number (example provided in Figure 2). As can be viewed in the example in Figure 3, the standard used can be unwrapped allowing the teacher to focus on one concept at a time if necessary (Morgan et al., 2014)

4. Filling in the Graphic Organizer

The graphic organizer is now ready to be filled in with activities. When choosing activities, the teacher will consider certain factors. First, the age and grade level of the learners are considered. Again, you are addressing the SEL standard filled in at the top of the Graphic Organizer (Figure 2).

4.1 Consider Domains and Guidelines

Now it is time to explore activities to address each domain listed across the top of the graphic organizer (see Figure 3), with consideration of the guidelines listed down the left side of the graphic (see Figure 4). With these in mind, the teacher will begin filling in each box with the guidance of each domain and guideline. See Figure 5 for an example of the first box filled in with an activity.

4.2 Vary Activities and Materials

It is important for teachers to remember that they may have activities they have facilitated in previous lessons which address social emotional learning. Many teachers have facilitated social emotional learning without necessarily addressing it as such. Teachers should draw on previous materials and activities they may have implemented in the past. It is good practice to continue to explore research-based materials, curriculum, and activities to add to the graphic organizer (see Table 2 for examples). Good practice also involves students in the planning (Mercer, et al., 2011). Allowing students to participate in the planning of activities gives students a sense of ownership and supports better classroom behavior (Wheeler & Richey, 2019).

4.3 Implement SEL Activities

Once activities have been created, it is time to include them in lesson planning. Sequencing the activities to address domains, one at a time, is the best plan of implementation (CASEL, 2021). Begin with the activities developed for the classroom. This allows teachers to focus on students understanding the standard of focus in a comfortable, concentrated learning environment. Then begin to work through the remaining CASEL domains. After the classroom, the teacher should take the activities to the school environment. Think of the school environment as the next level of implementation; allowing students to take what they have learned in the classroom and apply it to peers other than their classmates. This could include environments such as the lunchroom or playground, etc. The next domain of implementation is family. Students are taking the skills learned in the classroom and practiced at school into the family environment. The activities within this domain should be focused on engaging nuclear and extended family in activities that support social emotional learning. Getting families involved in any type of learning is good practice (Epstein & Sheldon, 2022). The final domain is community. Students can be engaged in community activities through school trips and family outings.

4.4 Consider Phases of Learning

One more process to consider when lesson planning is which stage of learning students will be in when beginning implementation of Social Emotional Learning Standards. Evidence supports the practice of teaching students through phases of learning (Mercer, et al., 2011). Depending on the research reviewed

14

will depend on the number of phases suggested. Typically, four or five phases are recommended (Mercer et al., 2011). Basically, the phases of learning begin with acquisition and then scaffold through fluency, guided practice, generalization, and maintenance (Mercer et al., 2011). Whichever sequence of phases are used to develop lesson planning, it is important to consider the phase when developing lessons and including SEL activities. This can also be a key consideration when filling in the graphic organizer with activities. Best practice includes teaching the acquisition and fluency phases in the classroom domain. Then, moving guided practice, generalization, and maintenance to the school, family, and community domains.

5. Conclusion

Social emotional learning (SEL) is more critical than ever in all classroom settings. The integration of SEL standards in the inclusive classroom continues to be a need of focus. Special education teachers have integrated many facets of SEL through social skill, life skill, and transition skill implementation. The tools and resources provided in this article support the integration of social emotional learning in any classroom. The steps to designing and building SEL-focused activities with the integration of Universal Design are outlined in this article. A reproducible graphic organizer, along with step-by-step details of how to use the graphic organizer, are provided. Samples of resources are also included.

Figures

Figure 1

Graphic Organizer

Figure 2

Standard added to Graphic Organizer

Figure 3

CASEL Domains in Graphic Organizer

Standard: Demonstrates knowledge of personal strengths, areas for growth, culture, linguistic assets, and aspirations (1B)

CASEL Domains

	Classroom	School	Family	Community
Engagement:				
Representation:				
Action/Expression:				

UDL Guidelines

Figure 4

UDL Guidelines in Graphic Organizer

Standard: Demonstrates knowledge of personal strengths, areas for growth, culture, linguistic assets, and aspirations (1B)

CASEL Domains

	Classroom	School	Family	Community
Engagement:				
Representation:				
Action/Expression:				

UDL Guidelines

Figure 5

Sample Activity

Standard: Demonstrates knowledge of personal strengths, areas for growth, culture, linguistic assets, and aspirations (1B)

CASEL Domains

	Classroom	School	Family	Community
Engagement:	Students bring in books and items from home that represent themselves to share with class.			
Representation:				
Action/Expression:				

UDL Guidelines

Figure 6

Sample of a Completed Graphic Organizer

Standard: **Demonstrates knowledge of personal strengths, areas for growth, culture, linguistic assets, and aspirations (1B)**

CASEL Domains

UDL Guidelines		Classroom	School	Family	Community
	Engagement:	Students bring in books and items from home that represent themselves to share with class.	Posters, music, and other media on display around and in school such as Kelso's Choices ©; CASEL graphic ©; Onion Head ©; etc.	Reach out to families of your classroom to make aware of activities they can assist their child with, in the coming weeks, related to their child' strengths, family culture, etc.	Take a survey of student interests of activities happening in the community.
	Representation:	Teacher allows students to share their cultural representations to the class in chosen formats such as physical items, books, video clips, music, art, etc.	After school movie and performance nights.	Have students create a poster, graphic, piece of art, digital representation, or any other form of media in representation of their family and culture. This is something to be worked on at home with their family members then brought to class.	Allow students to choose places to visit as a field trip, such as a university, culinary schools, museums, theater, music festivals, food festivals, etc.
	Action/Expression:	Create a multimedia representation of yourself and your family (e.g., magazine clippings on a poster board; drawings in a journal; computer graphic, iMovie, etc.)	Before school and lunchtime activities shared by students such as music, art, performances, food, etc.	Allow students to share their piece of media they created with their family. Open the classroom to family members to visit and share relics or other items with the class.	Students will construct a reflection of their experience during the community trip. This reflection can be in any form of media and will be shared with their class.

Tables

Table 1

Sample List of State SEL Standards

State	URL
Washington	Washington Social Emotional Learning Standards
Nevada	Nevada SEAD
California	T-SEL Competencies and Conditions for Thriving
Texas	TEKS and SEL Standards
Arizona	Arizona DOE SEL Competencies and Framework
West Virginia	DOE Standards for Student Success
New York	NYSED SEL Documents and Resources

Table 2

Sample List of SEL Materials and Resources

Resource	Description
www.fwillismusic.com	Materials teaching self-awareness through music.
Self-Awareness https://mylearningtools.org/self-awareness/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwY-LBhD6ARIsACvT72Np9ksv4GEheq3RD3m_3wQidrqGlK9TRZAzyBb4SZXEJxmLQtr2bX0aAhCdEALw_wcB	Collection of videos and materials designed to develop self-awareness.
Texas Education Agency Resources https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/other-services/mental-health/building-skills-related-to-managing-emotions-establishing-and-maintaining-positive-relationships-and-responsible-decision-making	A collection of resources supporting multiple domains of social emotional development.
Pacer Center https://www.pacer.org/	A website filled with resources for families, schools, and individuals to support multiple areas of development of individuals with exceptionalities.
The Elementals: Actions for the Practice of Life https://www.boldleaders.org/elementals/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwY-LBhD6ARIsACvT72MbsbJ2QoYxTKBK_5a0q09Amvsp7nPfQt4P7L14k6BfG6KZa4pKSisaAmRWEALw_wcB	Materials designed to be incorporated into the teaching day to foster relationship building
Darlene Mannix Social Skills Materials https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Darlene+Mannix&i=stripbooks&ref=nb_sb_noss_2	A collection of lesson plans and materials supporting social skills, life skills, and transition skills.
Why CBI? Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i__gP3ZzQDA	Video explaining the importance and relevance of Community Based Instruction.
Edutopia https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning	A collection of articles and resources supporting the integration of social emotional learning into the learning day.

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