

SOWING SEEDS OF SEL

UNIVERSITY-DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP BUILDS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING ACROSS THE TEACHER PIPELINE

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Social and emotional learning (SEL) is critical to the success of students from preschool through high school — and for educators, across all stages of the career continuum.

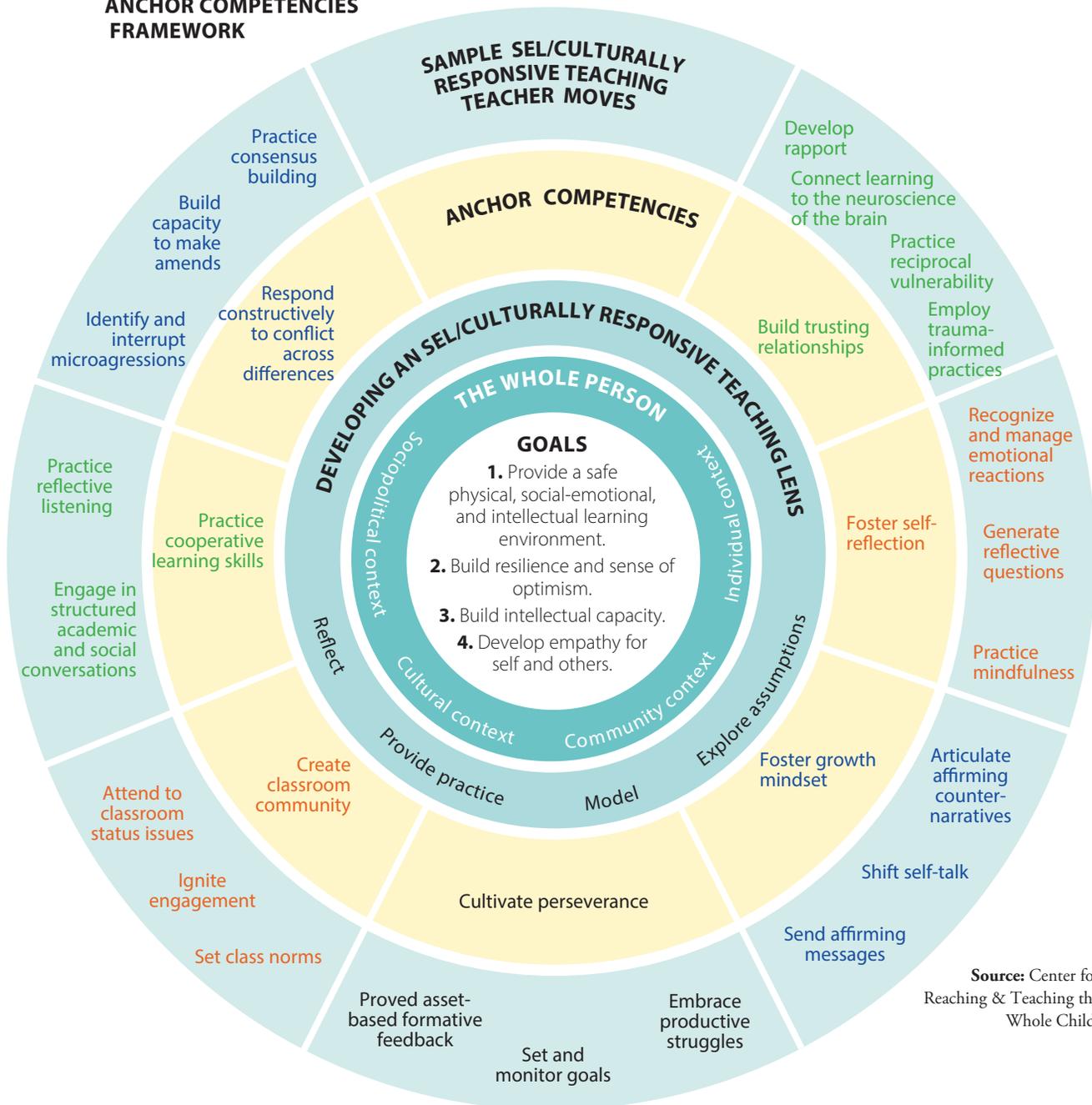
Because SEL skills take time to develop and mature, they should be part of the content addressed in teacher preparation programs, beginning teacher support, and ongoing teacher professional learning, including advanced teacher leadership. Unfortunately, training and support for SEL are rare at all of these levels.

A national scan of U.S. teacher preparation programs found that these programs pay limited attention to SEL, and when they do, they address only some dimensions of this complex area (Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2015).

Surveys show that most K-12 teachers believe SEL is important and teachable (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). However, teachers report limited training to enable them to support student SEL skill development (Reinke et al., 2011; Walter, Gouze, & Lim, 2006).

But even with effective preservice education, teachers need support to identify the SEL outcomes school communities desire for their graduates and to employ an SEL lens to improve academic outcomes. Additionally, SEL skill development needs to be placed within the context of student and teacher cultural, political,

ANCHOR COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK



Source: Center for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child.

community, and individual contexts to be successful (Aspen Institute, 2018).

One case study (Bouffard, 2017) followed two novice teachers who received their credential from San José State University, a program that is among the very few to address SEL skills, and found that, while the two new teachers were both committed to SEL, the support provided by their schools determined whether they

followed through on that commitment.

The teacher who took a job in a district that had SEL as a leadership goal thrived because of the support she felt from colleagues and because she was equipped to address academic, behavioral, and social-emotional challenges she encountered in her classroom.

The teacher who took a position in a district not supportive of SEL was frustrated and overwhelmed by student behavior problems, and she ended her first year of teaching not sure she wanted to continue in the field.

How do we create effective and meaningful SEL learning across the teacher professional development continuum that improves teaching and learning? A powerful yet underused

way is through a university-district partnership. This is the approach taken by the Center for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child together with San José State University and Sunnyvale School District in California.

Working together, these three partners use student teacher placements to build SEL capacity in two generations of teachers simultaneously. They lead professional learning with cooperating teachers — district teachers who serve as supervisors for teacher candidates' student teaching experiences.

The cooperating teachers then build and reinforce teacher candidates' SEL competencies by modeling and discussing the SEL capacities that have been taught during coursework. Importantly, first- and second-year teachers participate in comprehensive new teacher induction that supports the content they learned about SEL during the preservice program.

The end goals are a pipeline of well-prepared new teachers who understand the need for SEL and how to do it, meaningful professional learning for existing teachers, a cadre of teacher leaders equipped to move SEL forward in schools, and a district culture with consistent language and support of SEL competencies.

This kind of university-district partnership is not the norm in teacher preparation. Typically, student teaching placements are made based on convenience, and cooperating teachers participate in little or no professional learning in how to work with teacher candidates in a way that is intentionally tied to learning goals for the districts' students or for the program's teacher candidates.

This kind of intentionality is especially lacking for SEL. As teachers vary widely in their knowledge of and skill in SEL, teacher candidates may or may not get exposure to what high-

quality SEL teaching looks like.

We set out to change this pattern. Instead of making student teacher placements as a matter of convenience, we are designing them intentionally to create change toward greater attention to promoting a common language, commitment to, and competence in SEL.

THE SEEDS FOR GROWING SEL

The term “social and emotional learning” is a big tent, so it was important to ground the professional learning for cooperating teachers in a clear framework. We used the Anchor Competencies Framework and Guide (see p. 31) created by the Center for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child, which spells out a broad but focused set of SEL competencies needed by teachers, along with specific strategies to bring them to life in the classroom. The framework incorporates culturally responsive teaching competencies, which are foundational to SEL but not always explicitly addressed in SEL work.

The framework is a road map for both teacher preparation programs and teachers in the field. The ability to use the anchor competencies in the classroom takes time and an iterative process that involves examining assumptions, modeling and observing competencies, practicing strategies, and reflecting throughout the process.

The seven anchor competencies for integrating SEL and culturally responsive teaching into teaching and learning are:

- Build trusting relationships.
- Foster self-reflection.
- Foster growth mindset.
- Cultivate perseverance.
- Create classroom community.
- Practice cooperative learning skills.
- Respond constructively to conflict across differences.

As can be seen in the visual representation of the framework, these competencies and the sample teacher moves depend on attention to the individual, community, and sociopolitical contexts of both teachers and students.

CULTIVATING THE SOIL

Over the past five years, we developed and implemented a model that includes a series of four professional learning sessions for cooperating teachers who work with teacher candidates.

The sessions occur during the school day to send a message from the district about the importance of this work for teachers and students. The district recognizes the importance of SEL to teaching and learning, and especially the alignment between SEL competencies and Common Core State Standards, and therefore agreed to provide funding for teacher candidates to be paid as substitute teachers while their cooperating teachers attend four two-hour professional learning sessions throughout the academic year.

This arrangement allows teacher candidates to practice solo teaching while their cooperating teachers get the gift of time to think, discuss, and learn with colleagues across their school district. These teachers can then serve as teacher leaders, sharing their learning with the entire school faculty. See program goals and objectives on p. 33.

The Anchor Competencies Framework and Guide have proven to be a powerful road map for this work. Session topics include fostering a growth mindset, cultivating perseverance, and fostering self-reflection, along with the development of a common SEL and culturally responsive teaching vocabulary. Additionally, sessions cover topics such as cheating, racism, parent-teacher relationships, and how

to develop an inclusive classroom for diverse learners.

We primarily use videos, written teaching cases, and practice activities to help teachers practice using the SEL and culturally responsive teaching lens as they analyze classroom practice. Materials such as teaching cases and videos can act as catalysts for discussion about how to develop the lens and also how to teach others to develop the lens.

Some of the videos created by our partnership group, for example, demonstrate the integration of SEL into math instruction. Teachers get to watch a university faculty member teach about math instruction through an SEL lens, pinpointing the explicit language that can be used to promote growth mindset, foster perseverance, and address status issues in a classroom while learning new and difficult Common Core math content.

We also use videos from other sources, including some available online that may not have been developed as professional learning tools. For example, we discuss a 12-minute video called *Immersion* that prompts participants to look at a teacher who misses the chance to support a second language learner who clearly excels in math.

Viewing this video together allows us to engage in conversations and practice using SEL skills that could have led to a better outcome for student and teacher. Through these kinds of activities, cooperating teachers develop their SEL lens as well as their ability to observe SEL strategies and talk about them with teacher candidates.

SEEING SEL BLOOM AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

In surveys and informal feedback, cooperating teachers and teacher candidates tell us that these experiences have helped them develop an SEL lens—that is, not just an understanding

PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOALS

1. Understand and use a common language to discuss SEL and culturally responsive teaching.
2. Develop cooperating teachers' ability to integrate SEL and culturally responsive teaching into their own practice.
3. Strengthen the cooperating teachers' ability to help teacher candidates integrate SEL and culturally responsive teaching into their practice.
4. Connect co-teaching and social and emotional learning.
5. Explore the dispositions necessary for teachers and students to thrive and feel successful.

OBJECTIVES

1. Be able to explain the importance of SEL to academic achievement and students' ability to thrive.
2. Be able to explain the connection between SEL skill development for teachers and learners and the achievement of Common Core State Standards.
3. Be able to generate and try lessons with SEL foundational anchors to build a safe physical, social-emotional, and intellectual learning environment.
4. Be able to identify SEL skills needed within content-specific lessons.

of why SEL matters, but how to incorporate it into their day-to-day teaching.

One cooperating teacher said of her experience: "I went in thinking it was going to be all about strategies and programs, and somewhere along the way, I realized, SEL and culturally responsive teaching are not one-off lessons. Rather, they're completely embedded in my day-to-day teaching. It's [about] constantly reflecting on how my students are feeling, wondering if anything might be getting in the way, listening for and interrupting microaggressions, and monitoring status issues. ... I think I was a reasonable teacher before, but I know I am a better teacher now. I am more compassionate and better able to think long-term rather than just reacting to challenges in the moment. My lessons are more effective, and I've seen greater gains in student achievement."

Some cooperating teachers have developed leadership skills that have

renewed their excitement about teaching, and they have become either school site or district leaders, driving broader change to incorporate SEL into their schools. They are expanding their own competencies while at the same time learning new skills to support colleagues.

As one teacher explained: "It's helped me become a better listener when fellow teachers are struggling with issues. I've transitioned to a dual role as a classroom teacher and part-time instructional coach, and I've been able to apply many of the ideas and skills I've learned through the professional development to my coaching. I'm not sure I would have been effective in that role before the professional development."

The Sunnyside School District also benefits because the initiative is developing a pipeline of highly qualified new teachers, many of whom end up teaching in district schools and are already prepared to fulfill the district's

commitment to SEL and culturally responsive teaching.

Several essential conditions have led to these kinds of growth and positive outcomes: a supportive school district; consistency in SEL language and approaches across university, district, and nonprofit partners; a solid framework in which to ground the work; and that most essential but elusive element for schools: time.

Dedicated time across an entire school year allows ample opportunities for learning, practice, reflection, and improvement. Those processes are not only helpful for teachers, but are at the heart of the SEL competencies we want students to develop so that they can learn and thrive.

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