Effective Practices Brief

Social Emotional Learning Brief

Overview

This brief presents the relatively new concept of linking social and emotional awareness and skills to academic performance, demonstrating that we can not separate how we feel (about ourselves, our lives, relationships, dreams, or environments) from what we are teaching or learning. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is linked to and supports achieving Content and Performance Standards by encouraging educators to develop meaningful relationships with their students in order to make a difference in their academic achievement, in their total development, and in their lives. The rich field of SEL offers educators, families, and communities relevant and practical ways to better prepare students for "the tests of life, not a life of tests" (Elias, 2001), allowing us to attend to the heart, mind, and spirit of our children as they grow into the young adults we envision them to be.

What is Social and Emotional Learning and Why?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of developing and supporting the social and emotional skills and competencies of students through nurturing and caring learning environments and experiences. SEL emphasizes active learning techniques and the generalization of skills across subjects, which provide opportunities to practice and to develop attitudes, behaviors and thinking processes to support students in becoming "healthy and competent" members of society (Elias, et.al., 1997).

Social emotional learning is supported by current brain research which shows that emotions affect how and what we learn and that positive relationships create a strong foundation for learning. When students feel a threat to their emotional and or physical safety, irregardless of whether this threat is real or imagined, there is a loss of ability to focus, to attend to the learning process, and to solve problems creatively. (Goleman, 1995). When students have had negative learning experiences it is important to address these experiences and move forward together in a healing way by creating safe, caring, and meaningful learning environments and experiences. (Simonelli, 2002). Conversely, when students have safe and positive learning experiences their brains link this learning to larger blocks of memory

Contacts

For additional copies of this brief go to: www.sig.hawaii.edu/final_products

Robert Stodden Ph.D.
Center on Disability Studies UHM, (808) 956-9199 stodden@hawaii.edu

Carolyn Hamada
Educational Specialist DOE (808) 733-4832 x 255 carolyn_hamada@notes.k12.hi.us

Shannon Simonelli Ph.D.
Center on Disability Studies UHM, (808) 956-8710 simonell@hawaii.edu

Judy Nagasako
Resource Teacher – Character Education, (808)735-8250 x349 judy_nagasako@notes.k12.hi.us

which make up what is retained (Elias, et.al., 1997).

The process of social and emotional learning builds five central competencies in students:

- **Self-awareness** – knowing what we are feeling in the moment, having a realistic assessment of our own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence
- **Social or other-awareness** – understanding what others are feeling, being able to take their perspective, appreciating and interacting positively with diverse groups
- **Relationship skills** – handling emotions in relationships effectively, establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation, resistance to inappropriate social pressure, negotiating solutions to conflict, and seeking help when needed.
- **Self-management** – Handling our emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand, being conscientious and delaying gratification to pursue goals, persevering in the face of setbacks and frustrations.
- **Decision making** – Making decisions based on accurate consideration of all relevant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action, respecting others, and taking responsibility for one's decisions (CASEL, 2003).

What SEL programs look like

Effective social and emotional learning approaches dove tail into the Hawai`i Department of Education's established commitment to the Comprehensive Student Support System (CSSS). Broad research reviews show the most successful SEL approaches span at least two years, are school wide with a central focus on the school climate and ecology, and address multiple areas (family involvement, community involvement, etc.), rather than exclusively focusing on "improving" the student (Greenberg et al. 2003). Successful programs are research based, identify key factors for successful implementation, establish policies and supports on an administrative level, provide high-quality professional development and supports for staff and leadership, involve community and family members, and have a way to evaluate and improve on their process (Zins et al., n.d.).

Positive outcomes are produced through: "(a) partnering between teachers and families to encourage and reinforce learning commitment, engagement, and positive behavior; (b) safe and orderly school and classroom environments; (c) caring relationships between students and teachers that foster commitment and connection to school; (d) engaging teaching approaches such as cooperative learning and proactive classroom management; and (e) adult and peer norms that convey high expectations and support for high-quality academic performance." (Greenberg et al. 2003).

Strategies for providing positive social and emotional learning opportunities can include implementing specific curricula (see www.CASEL.org), creating more positive and supportive learning environments, adapting instructional processes (and class size) to include time to explore what matters to students and to practice new skills as relevant to learning and academic success. Be creative by infusing components of SEL into the curriculum and involve your students as they can be central resources for this effort both in the classroom and throughout the school.

Student-focused and relationship-oriented strategies

Let these ideas be a beginning place, you might develop some of your own practices and develop school wide supports for social and emotional learning. These efforts can

ripple from the classroom through the campus and out into the community:

- **Exhibit pro-social and emotionally literate behaviors to your students.** Teachers are an important role model for students and set the standard for interactions within their classroom. In modeling emotionally literate and respectful relationships with students, you will be better equipped to help them translate that experience to other relationships in their life. Encourage and acknowledge professional peers as they nurture meaningful, respectful and supportive relationships with students.

- **Have students keep a daily journal.** In keeping a daily journal, you are not only helping students to reflect on assignments in the classroom, but are also allowing the students to increase their own self awareness, self expression and self reflection. As you read through the daily entries, be sure to jot down some notes to the students as a way of showing that their feelings are important, that you (the teacher) are really reading the entries, and that they deserve some thought and reflection on your part. This practice is applicable to all subjects and will help you to establish meaningful relationships that can be deeply rewarding to both you and the student.

- **Check in with students daily.** Have students close their eyes and reflect on their day thus far. Then, ask each student to share a word or phrase that captures their state of being. In sharing how they are feeling inside, students are practicing how to identify their emotions, share them with other people in a positive and responsible way, and reflect on how their mood and the emotional states of others can affect everyone. It may be helpful to have students pass around a small ball or stuffed animal to signify who has the floor and the group's attention. This exercise can be especially helpful in the morning as a way to check in with students and raise your awareness of classroom dynamics and peer relationships.

- **Translate SEL learning experiences into real world application.** As a teacher, you are constantly surrounded by opportunities to teach social and emotional learning that occur naturally every day. When conflicts arise, use the situation as a way to talk about the student feelings, how they think the other person feels, what are some possible solutions and using the supposed consequences of those solutions to allow the student to choose the best course of action.

These strategies are only a beginning, but they can allow you to systematically develop, support, value, and reward positive social, emotionally oriented, healthy, and academically focused behaviors.

How SEL links to standards

The drive to meet Content Standards is the focus of much of today's teaching. Within Hawai`i Content Standards there are Generalized Learner Outcomes (GLO) which address the ways in which students function as learners and how they develop as life long learners. "Content Standards are a means to get to the GLOs, not an end in and of itself." (Paul Ban personal communication, November 13, 2003). The foundation of social and emotional learning incorporates the essence of many of the GLOs. Additionally, Hawai`i Teaching Standards address the founding principles and objectives of social and emotional learning strategies which support teachers in: focusing on the learner (HTS 1), creating and maintaining a safe and positive learning environment (HTS 2), including all learners through sensitivity to learner diversity (HTS 3), fostering effective communication in the learning environment (HTS 4), offering learning experiences that

are meaningful/relevant (HTS 6), using active student learning strategies (HTS 7), and demonstrating professionalism through positive and effective social skills and emotional literacy and competency.

Developing and integrating social and emotional learning strategies into a school wide approach to creating successful, positive, and supportive learning environments is not adding "one more thing", rather, SEL offers research based strategies and approaches that support much of what schools and teachers are already working to address and create with their students.

Summary

Research draws strong links between academic performance and supporting students and teachers in developing meaningful relationships that attend to the social and emotional needs and concerns of all students. We are learning that instead of being "extras" social and emotional skills are central to positive learning environments, positive academic outcomes, emotional health, and successful transitions into adult life. Research shows that the most effective social and emotional programs are school wide and expose students to at least two consecutive years of skill building, practice and active learning opportunities to develop social and emotional competencies. School wide efforts which begin in the classroom and ripple into student's homes and community hold the most promise for long term and meaningful results. In our push to meet standards, academics with a singular or primary focus on "the basics" don't make sense nor do they meet the needs of students, families or communities in today's world.

To receive the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning e-newsletter Connections and other pertinent information go to: www.CASEL.com and register to be on their mailing list.

References

Bauwens, J. & Simonelli, S. (2003). Planning for reaching the standards: Classrooms that work for diverse learners. *Effective Practices Brief* [On-line]. Available: http://www.sig.hawaii.edu/final.products/final.htm#effective

Brooks, R. (in press). Creating a positive school climate: Strategies for fostering self-esteem, motivation, and resilience. In Cohen, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Educating Minds and Hearts: Social and emotional learning and the passage into adolescents.* New York: Teachers College Press. http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/technlgy/te101k12.htm

CASEL. (2003). *Safe and Sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs.* Illinois: Chicago.WWW.casel.org

Cohen, J. (Eds). (1999). *Educating Minds and Hearts: Social and emotional learning and the passage into adolescents.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Elias, M. J., Zins, J.E., Weissberg, R.P., Frey, K.S., Greenberg, M.T., Haynes, N.M., Kessler, R., Schwab-Stone, M.E., Shriver, T.P. (1997). *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for educators.* Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Elias, M. J. (2001). Prepare Children for the Tests of Life, Not a Life of Tests. *Education Week* [on-line]. http://www.edweek.org/ew/ew_printstory.cfm?slug=04elias.h21

Gardner, H. (1993). *The Multiple Intelligences: The theory in practice.* New York: Basic Books.

Golman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence.* New York: Bantum

Hawai`i Teaching Standards and Content and Performance Standards http://doe.k12.hi.us

Kessler, R. (1991). The teaching presence. *Holistic Education Review, 4* (4), 4-15.

Simonelli, S. (2003). Wisdom in the wound: Acknowledging soul level impoverishment in traditional learning experiences as the doorway to change. (Available from Dr. Shannon Simonelli at the Center on Disability Studies, 1776 University Avenue, UA4-6, Honolulu, HI 96822 simonell@hawaii.edu)