

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND ETHICAL LEARNING AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

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Abstract:

There is an increased body of research indicating the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) in schools. SEL is the processes of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively. It is pro-moted through both direct instruction and the establishment of safe, caring, and support-ive learning environments in which all students feel valued, respected, and connected. In support of such arguments are studies linking SEL to a number of positive students' outcomes, including beter academic achievement, social behavior, and emotional well-being. This chapter addresses how SEL, especially relationships as a critical component of SEL, contributes to school success and mental health especially among youth, with research evidence. Further, on the basis that we often do not feel eicacious in fostering SEL due to inadequate training and information, this chapter provides evidence-based practices to support healthy relationships and learning environments.

Key words: *Social, Emotional Learning, Relationships, Ethics*

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Introduction:

The skills of emotional literacy and self-regulation that we learn in the Personal Domain are undoubtedly of great benefit to us as we progress through life. However, as human beings are social by nature, it is equally important that we can relate well with others. It was previously thought that social traits are inborn and immutable, but recent scientific research increasingly suggests that social traits can be cultivated through learning, reflection and intentional practice. "Social" refers to our immediate interpersonal interactions, as well as interactions within a small-scale community, such as a school, office, family or neighborhood. Larger-scale communities, such as a town, a society, or the world as a whole, are covered in the third and final domain, Global.

Compassion for Others:

All social traits can be seen to both stem from, and contribute to, compassion for others. While interpersonal awareness paves the way for the cultivation of a wide range of social traits, compassion helps to place them into an ethical context. There are three ways to develop compassion for others: Understanding Others' Feelings and Emotions in Context

- Appreciating and Cultivating Kindness and Compassion
- Appreciating and Cultivating Other Ethical Dispositions

- Understanding Others' Feelings and Emotions in Context



Fig:- SEE learning

Not understanding our own emotions can lead to self-judgment; similarly, when we see other people act in ways we do not understand or approve of, we naturally react with judgment. In the same way that understanding how our emotions arise from wants and needs leads to self-acceptance and self-compassion, this process likewise works when looking at others.

If we understand that other people's actions are spurred by emotions, and that these emotions arise within a context and from an underlying need, it can lead to empathy and compassion rather than anger and judgment. The intention here is not to excuse inappropriate behavior, but to understand others and their emotions on a human level.

Appreciating and Cultivating Kindness and Compassion:

It might seem obvious that we should value compassion over cruelty, yet it is easy to become estranged from this basic fact. From our own experience and from historical examples we can see how we ourselves have not always valued compassion. Throughout history there are countless examples when humans have accepted the cruelty of others, or simply dismissed their own cruel acts.

Compassion is a powerful principle that can greatly benefit us, but simply ordering our minds to be compassionate doesn't work. We need to understand what compassion is and is not, and come to value it as something we wish to cultivate. It is usually easier to start with kindness – developing a considerate, caring attitude toward others – before moving on to compassion.

Compassion is defined as the wish to alleviate the suffering of others. Although many do not view compassion as a central aspect of human existence, research points to the biological roots of compassion. All mammals and birds require maternal care to survive, due to the fact that they cannot live on their own after birth. Altruistic behavior in various species, including humans, creates reciprocal bonding that supports survival and flourishing

on both the individual and group levels. Thus, in many ways, compassion is a matter of survival. This explains why humans have a strong preference for kindness from a very young age, and why we respond so positively to compassion, even on a physiological level.

Appreciating and Cultivating Other Ethical Dispositions:

Aside from compassion, we can also cultivate dispositions including gratitude, forgiveness, contentment, humility, patience and so on. Common to all of these ethical dispositions is that they refer to inner qualities – rather than material possessions or accomplishments – that bring benefit and happiness to our lives. A focus on valuing people and appreciating how they enrich our lives is opposite to the idea that self-promotion and the acquisition of possessions are the keys to long-term satisfaction and happiness. We need to come to appreciate just how important these inner qualities are. Research shows that while life satisfaction drops off after a certain level of material well-being, there are strong links between gratitude and happiness in children and adults alike. Gratitude not only leads to greater life satisfaction; but can also be a powerful antidote to the materialistic messages conveyed by social media, advertising and television.

Other people benefit us in so many ways, and it isn't even necessary that it is intentional for us to experience the benefits. We can also appreciate what others haven't done – they haven't stolen, harmed, or insulted us. On a more advanced level, we can even learn to appreciate the benefit we receive when others act in harmful ways. We can study the examples of people who experience and yet survive extreme hardship, managing to transform their perspectives and lead happier, more fulfilling lives. While we shouldn't condone the wrong behavior of others, this ability to take a new perspective is a powerful way to release anger, resentment and hatred. Our exploration of the ways in which others benefit us can result in the cultivation of a genuine and abiding sense of gratitude, which in turn serves as a powerful bond and connection with others.

When we reflect on the disadvantages of a self-centered attitude, and how our own happiness and well-being depend on the countless acts of kindness shown by others, we will naturally feel gratitude.

We also need to cultivate empathy, which is the ability to recognize and be sensitive to the experiences of others, including both their joys and sorrows. Most of us automatically feel empathy with our friends and loved ones, but it is possible to expand it to be wide-reaching and impartial. When we combine empathy with the knowledge of our fundamental shared similarities, a genuine empathy that is less constrained by bias can emerge. Relating with others empathically involves making an effort to understand their viewpoint and situation. For instance, instead of saying “this person is selfish,” we can instead say “their behavior can be considered selfish.” This helps us not to see the person as permanently selfish and allows us to be open to noticing instances when they are being unselfish.

As we explore our similarities with others and develop gratitude and empathy, we also naturally start to generate forgiveness. When we've released our unrealistic expectations and cultivated self-acceptance, it will be easy to release anger and resentment that we hold toward others. Forgiveness thus becomes a gift we give to ourselves.

Relationship Skills:

We routinely have to navigate complex social interactions, from friendships to family drama to office dynamics.

An ability to adapt to a wide range of social settings is necessary in order to be happy and successful. Long-term well-being is significantly related to the ability to form and maintain meaningful and positive relationships, while also being able to recognize and terminate harmful ones.

The previous two components of this course – awareness of our social nature, combined with understanding others’ emotions in context – create a foundation upon which we can build the actual skills, behaviors and practices that are most conducive to our own and others’ well-being. Even if our behavior is grounded in empathy and compassion, sometimes our actions actually prove counterproductive. We might have good intentions, but can end up inadvertently causing difficulties for ourselves and others. We can minimize this by gaining more experience. We can actively practice any skills learned until they become embodied and natural. There are four aspects that we can train in:

- Empathic Listening
- Skillful Communication
- Helping Others
- Conflict Transformation
- Empathic Listening

Empathic listening is to listen to others with an open mind, and to not become closed off due to emotional reactivity. It is grounded in respect and appreciation for the other person, even if their views differ from our own. We can practice empathic listening with “deep listening” exercises where we attempt to listen to others without comment or judgment for a few minutes at a time. Or, we can watch or listen to people who say things we might disagree with, but then pause to paraphrase or re-state what they say before we react to it emotionally.

Empathic listening should be listening that pays attention not only to surface-level content, but also the underlying needs and aspirations that may provide the context for understanding the content of what people say.

Skillful Communication:

Listening is very important, but we also need to be able to communicate what we want to say in a way that is considerate, productive and empowering to ourselves and others. The concept of “empowering communication” refers to our ability to speak respectfully and articulately, not only for ourselves, but also for those who may not be able to speak for themselves. Debate can be a very powerful tool. For instance, we could choose to debate with friends, and take the side that we would normally disagree with. Since we as humans have a tendency to delegitimize or even dehumanize those who oppose our viewpoints, such exercises can help to cultivate humility, intellectual curiosity and a sense of common humanity.

Helping Others:

Listening and communicating are fundamental, but there are innumerable other ways to help others. Helping others should always be appropriate to others’ needs, and also proportionate to our own ability. From community service to volunteerism to “random acts of kindness,” research shows that providing help contributes even more to our own well-being than receiving help.

We can take time to reflect on the process of helping others: how we feel when we do it, what we learn from it,

how we could enhance it, and what impact it has on those we're trying to help. Finally, we can explore what kind of help others may truly need for their long-term well-being, beyond what may appear superficially to be the case.

Conflict Transformation:

We inevitably encounter conflict throughout our lives. Conflict is not necessarily bad in itself; but learning to navigate conflict for ourselves and others is a vital skill. Resolving a conflict is only part of the way toward a transformation of circumstances and relationships that can enhance well-being for both sides. For this, we need to be able to respond constructively to conflict and to facilitate collaboration, reconciliation and peaceful relations.

Inner peacefulness serves as the foundation for outer peacefulness. Likewise, inner reconciliation can lead to outer reconciliation. Dealing with our inner world maximizes the chances of successful conflict transformation. Without the cultivation of humility, empathy, compassion, forgiveness, impartiality and a recognition of our shared common humanity, conflict transformation and resolution are difficult, if not impossible. Where these skills are present, the task of conflict resolution can become a deep and truly transformative experience for all parties involved.

Skills that develop social awareness include:

- Identifying social cues (verbal, physical) to determine how others feel
- Taking others' perspectives
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- Understanding and expressing gratitude
- Recognizing strengths in others
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
- Caring about and being motivated to contribute to the well-being of one's family, friends, school, community, the environment, and the greater good

“Relationship skills” is the ability to build positive relationships, especially with diverse individuals and groups, using a variety of methods such as active listening, and communication and conflict resolution skills. These skills also include the ability to resist pressure and to seek out and offer help.

Relationship skills include:

- Initiating contact with others and cultivating friendship
- Sharing one's thoughts and feelings (appropriately)
- Communicating effectively
- Developing positive relationships
- Demonstrating cultural humility
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving

- Resolving conflicts constructively
- Approaching relationships with positive presuppositions
- Resisting negative social pressure
- Resisting stereotypes
- Standing up for the rights of others
- Showing leadership in groups
- Seeking or offering support and help when needed

Ultimately, social awareness and relationship skills are closely linked. For example, when students attempt to resolve a conflict between themselves (relationship skills), the process is made easier when both are able to empathize with each other (social awareness).

Intervention programs and professional training for family and teachers:

To encourage family involvement, it is important to first consider the underlying factors that may motivate or hinder such involvement. At the family level, three major factors have been identified to drive involvement, including parents' motivational beliefs, perception of invitations, and perceived life contexts [85]. Specifically, family involvement is more likely to occur when parents hold a belief that they should be involved in education, feel efficacious that their involvement would promote better outcomes, perceive that they are welcomed by the school, teachers, and the child, as well as have the necessary skills, knowledge, time, and energy to become involved [85]. In support of this, children whose parents endorse the belief that it is their role to be involved in education and feel efficacious in doing so have more adaptive functioning [86]. When families feel that they are welcomed and respected, they are able to form more trusting relationships with schools; this is also especially true in inclusive [98] and culturally diverse schools [99].

Conclusion
Social, Emotional and Ethical (SEE) Learning is a program developed by the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics at Emory University. Its aim is to nurture emotionally healthy and ethically responsible individuals, social groups and wider communities. In this second part, SEE Learning: Cultivating Social Skills, we learn to develop a range of social skills that promote well-being and harmony in our relationships with others. The cultivation of relationship skills is tied to the principles of kindness and compassion. Once we practice them sufficiently, social skills do not remain merely a set of techniques; they transform into a natural outcome of our sense of appreciation and concern for others. When we adopt and practice positive strategies throughout the social contexts we experience, not only are our relationships more harmonious, but we become happier and more fulfilled. If you would like to go deeper, read the full version of the SEE Learning Framework and learn about the other programs of the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics.

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