

CHAPTER 2

The Teacher Role and the Student Role in Everyday SEL Practice

The most valuable metrics we can use to understand a student’s academic progress will always remain the ones that are collected by educators and schools on a regular basis in the classrooms—even virtual ones—where individual relationships with students are fostered and strategies for support can be designed in real-time.

—Tony Thurmond, California State Superintendent of Schools (2021)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Colleagues on the SEL integration assessment journey will be able to

- Identify and explain the teacher’s role in assessing SEL competencies
- Understand that they already “do” SEL assessing everyday
- Describe the feedback/feed forward assessment process
- Implement ongoing effective feedback/feed forward to set clear learning outcomes, provide ongoing information about learning progress, and support SEL growth
- Explain the student’s role in increasing SEL dispositions, knowledge, and performance

SETTING THE STAGE—THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN THE SEL THROUGH EVERYDAY ASSESSMENT JOURNEY

Social Emotional Learning is about *the learner*. Assessment of SEL skills is a daily and ongoing process. Gathering data to provide feedback about SEL growth is intended to be used for helping students acquire SEL knowledge, skills, and competencies. It is not about collecting data for reporting, grading, or compliance. It is not about testing. That is why the role of the teacher is critical in creating an effective student focused SEL learning environment.

What dispositions, knowledge, and performance skills are needed for a teacher to successfully integrate SEL through everyday assessment? Let's explore each of those areas.

DISPOSITIONS

Dispositions are defined as what one believes. Teachers who successfully use formative ongoing assessment practices to provide evidence of growth believe that students have an integral role in the assessment process. They believe that student voice is essential to student learning. Teachers believe that their ongoing formative assessment practices inform both teaching and learning. They include students in learning how to use assessment results through providing timely meaningful feedback for student success. They thoughtfully create a safe learning environment for students to practice becoming more SEL competent.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is what you know. Teachers who integrate SEL through everyday assessment know that there are different purposes for assessment. They know that the purpose of SEL assessing is to provide clear feedback about student SEL knowledge and skills. They know that feedback needs to be immediate, meaningful, and given with sensitivity. Adults with strong SEL skills themselves understand that how feedback is delivered can be the difference between motivation to do better or demotivation to stop learning. Finally, teachers know how to engage students in using their own assessment results for personal reflection and goal setting. This teacher knowledge base creates a safe learning environment where students know that they will be encouraged to try and will be supported in their SEL journey.

PERFORMANCE

A performance is when you apply something, it is your action, it is what you do. SEL educators use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather information about student progress. They use assessments that are developmentally and culturally appropriate. They apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning in their assessments. That means they create opportunities for multiple ways that students show what they have learning. They set clear learning targets that students understand. They use assessment results to make decisions about what comes next. They provide timely, meaningful, and descriptive feedback and feed forward to students. They teach students how to use this information to reflect, to set new goals, and to improve attitudes, dispositions, and achievement.

THE POWER OF EFFECTIVE DAILY SEL ASSESSMENT

Connecting SEL assessment and the learner, contextualizes the ongoing challenge of providing clear feedback which *encourages learning*—instead of impeding it. Punitive assessments in the form of summative tests, with high-stakes summative assessments being the norm, have dominated public education to the detriment of both learning and teaching for decades. Assessing through daily practice requires a major shift in understanding the difference between and the purposes of assessing versus testing. For some, “test” is a four-letter word that elicits fear and anxiety for many. Integrating SEL daily is presented here as the antidote to our over-focused attention on testing for ranking, reporting, and compliance. A teacher, who believes that students should be active partners in learning, teach their students to use assessment feedback to improve their learning.

SHIFTING YOUR MINDSET

To understand and create a new SEL assessment system in the classroom, let’s begin by talking about some assumptions we believe are true. The first one is that you, the reader, do not “buy into” the current educational assessment system as it is currently structured, along with the extensive reports and statistics that show by design that learners are in a constant state of “failing.” Second, we would like to assume that you are an “assessment literate educator.” Third, you know in your heart that students are struggling and that educators are struggling to apply methods of assessing that are more humane and more socially, emotionally, developmentally, and culturally relevant. Students are struggling with the aftermath of a pandemic that has disrupted the

educational system—as it was. Educators are struggling to help students gain self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, decision-making, and relationship competencies needed to be successful in school, community, and beyond. And finally, we hope you believe there is a solution to these challenges.

WHAT IS “ASSESSMENT” AND WHAT ARE THE TRAITS OF AN ASSESSMENT LITERATE PERSON?

Assessing is not testing. Assessment is the process of gathering information in an ongoing manner to provide feedback by providing information (how did I do?) and feed forward by planning (what do I need to do next?) for the purpose of supporting learning. Teachers assess all day every day. Think about the hundreds of “assessments” you automatically do. You scan each student as you greet them, checking how they are feeling. You provide feedback—“Allison, are you feeling okay today?” You note when someone is distracted. “Jon, I would like for you to focus, please” We most likely do not even consider these thoughts as assessments, but they are. Ongoing formative assessment is an art and a science. SEL assessment is a daily process we are already using. We need to acknowledge this and create a system that works for student SEL growth.

In order to do assessing right and to do it well, we need some prerequisite knowledge and skills.

Assessment is the process of gathering information about student learning to inform education-related decisions. One becomes assessment literate by mastering basic principles of sound assessment practice, coming to believe strongly in their consistent, high-quality application in order to meet the diverse needs of all students, and acting assertively based on those values. (Assessment Literacy Defined, 2016, p. 1)

The role of the teacher is to deeply embrace the SEL competencies for the purpose of creating and developing engaging learning opportunities so that students can acquire SEL knowledge and skills; and to confidently assess social and emotional competencies for the purpose of motivating and encouraging ongoing SEL growth.

In this book, we must assume that the reader is assessment literate. When we integrate SEL through everyday assessment, by assessing using the feedback (how did I do?) and feed forward (what do I do next?) loop, we assess in a systematic manner that

results in students gaining the social and emotional competencies necessary to be more successful in academics and life. And SEL assessment is not done to the learner. It is not simply implementing a learning activity and determining how that activity increased a specific SEL competency. It is done *with* the learner. The learner has had both choice and voice about the activity and understands how to show their understanding of the competency. This distinction is key to SEL success. We will provide details on how to accomplish this in later chapters.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT THE SEL LEARNING COMPETENCIES ARE?

The broad list of SEL Standards, also called competencies, is well known to those who practice and teach SEL competencies in their classrooms. In this text we have adapted the CASEL 5: self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation/self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. States and school districts have adopted and adapted this core 5 SEL competencies and many T-K 12 institutions use them in the implementation of their SEL programs.

The next step for those who implement social emotional learning is to understand that students' social, emotional, and cognitive growth is neither linear nor even. Piaget's cognitive theory of implication assumes that all children go through the same sequence of development, but they do so at different rates. Educators must make a special effort to provide classroom activities and assessments for individuals and small groups, rather than for the total class group. There are not 30 children acquiring SEL self-regulation skills at the same time with the same degree of accomplishment. Assessment should be based on individual progress, rather than on the normal standards of peers of the same age. Individuals construct their own knowledge during the course of the interaction with the environment.

The bears repeating: The process of developing SEL knowledge and skills is not a linear one. There are a variety of factors that impact the acquisition of SEL competencies, just as there are many factors affecting cognitive growth. Family cultural norms, trauma, disasters and environmental events such as Hurricane Irma, and others disrupt the acquisition of SEL competencies. Knowing this allows the teacher to create learning opportunities that are aligned to the needs of students in a specific learning environment.

In a framework brief presented by CASEL titled, *Keeping SEL Developmental: The Importance of a Developmental Lens for Fostering and Assessing SEL Competencies*, we learn that SEL is developmental.

. . . certain SEL competencies “pull for” specific types of assessment, and particularly, perhaps, at specific ages. For example, aspects of early childhood and primary grades SEL (e.g., emotion knowledge, responsible decision-making) might require direct assessment for best results; competencies that refer to knowledge may always be best assessed directly. Behavioral skills are easily rated, but as children move into middle and high school, the question of who should do the rating becomes an issue. (Denham, 2018, p. 11)

The message is this—the role of the teacher in integrating SEL through everyday assessment is key to the effective acquisition of SEL competencies. Your SEL assessment dispositions, knowledge, and performances have the potential to create a safe, respectful learning environment that supports SEL learning.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT IN INTEGRATING SEL THROUGH EVERYDAY ASSESSMENT

An assessment literate educator knows that **student growth** is accomplished by engaging learners in learner-centric assessing practices, thus actively engaging them in their own learning.

In a learner-centric environment, learners understand:

- why their learning is being assessed in each context
- what learning target they are trying to master
- how they will receive accurate information about their learning progress
- their individual learning progress is being assessed to help them develop
- they can ask for and receive the information they need to help them learn and grow in SEL competencies
- and that they have an important role in promoting their own success

SEL assessing is, therefore, a partnership with the learner. It is a carefully planned systematic practice that assesses FOR student learning. It provides practitioners with the standards, competencies, essential knowledge, performances, and critical dispositions that learners at each level need to know to move forward. It includes rubrics that are used to create intimate conversations with learners, in order to provide meaningful feedback to guide the learning. Every step of the way, learners know: What am I expected to know? How am I doing? What do I need to do next?

Every element of the SEL assessment is designed to increase student learning in a safe and respectful environment and to give learners choice and voice.

SETTING THE STAGE—THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT IN SEL THROUGH EVERYDAY ASSESSMENT JOURNEY

In United States public education today, students usually are passive recipients in the assessment process. They take tests. The results are given to their teachers and parents. Very little is explained about the purpose of the tests, let alone what the results mean. If data is collected, it is rarely shared with the learner. As Dr. Stiggins (2017, *The Perfect Assessment System*, p. xi) has advocated for over four decades, when educators are assessment literate, this abuse and misuse of testing in our schools which leads too many students to conclude that they're not smart or capable enough and that school success is hopelessly out of our their reach stops. When ongoing formative assessment replaces testing, a shift occurs from using data about learning to make judgments to using data and information for learning.

The role of the student in the SEL journey changes in this learning environment. Let's identify the dispositions, knowledge, and performance standards that are embedded in an SEL manner when assessing is a practice integrated every day.

STUDENT DISPOSITIONS (WHAT STUDENTS BELIEVE)

Students and their families who understand the power of assessment for learning believe that students learn best when they are provided with clear expectations and learning targets. They receive regular feedback about their efforts and guidance about their next steps for gaining knowledge and skills. They engage with their teachers in conversations about their progress. They take responsibility for their own learning because it is very clear what and why SEL is essential to personal and academic development. Students expect to succeed in this learning environment. Their voice is included in their own learning process.

STUDENT KNOWLEDGE (WHAT STUDENTS KNOW)

Students in learning environments where learning outcomes are clearly explained, who engage in feedback and feed forward conversations with teachers, and whose voices are heard know

that there are different types of assessments. They understand there are different purposes for different kinds of assessments. Sometimes assessments are used for accountability and other times for grading. Sometimes assessments are not graded but are used to determine progress towards gaining knowledge. In a classroom where the teacher provides ongoing formative assessment for learning—whether aligned to SEL competencies or academic standards—students know the results of assessments can help them to learn and set goals. They are knowledgeable about tools for self-assessment such as reflection and journaling. They know that rubrics help them to understand what is expected, what the criteria are for learning, and how they are progressing. There are no surprises in a learning environment where formative ongoing assessments are integrated to support gaining new knowledge and skills. Both the teacher and the student openly discuss progress in a way that the student understands what they have accomplished and what is next.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE (WHAT STUDENTS DO)

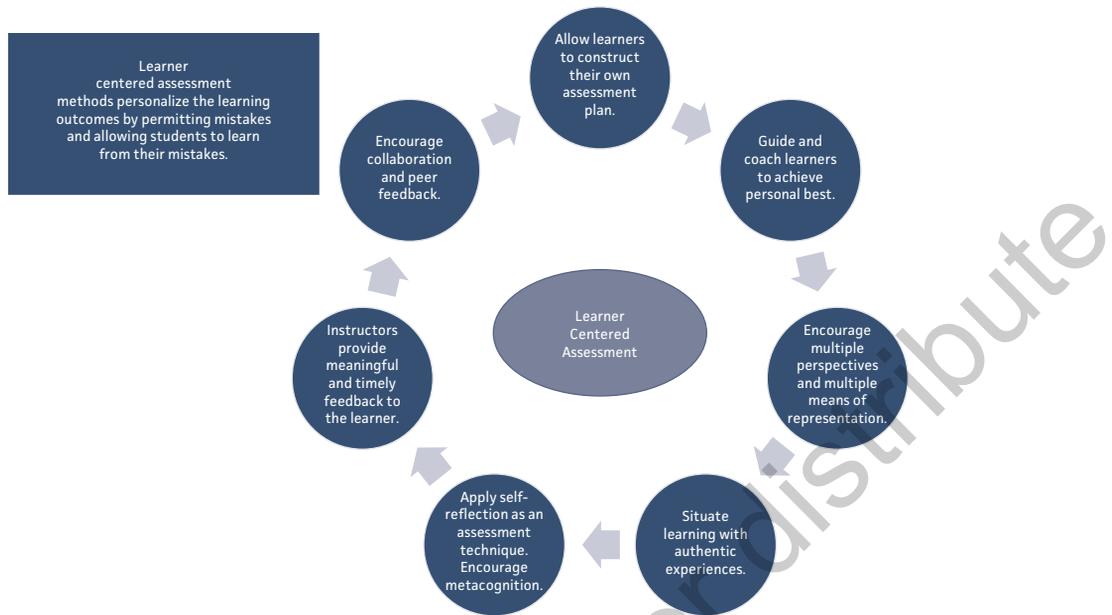
Ongoing SEL assessment that is **formative** offers a variety of ways for students to represent their knowledge. The assessment-literate educator knows that just as students learn in a variety of ways, they show what they have learned through different avenues. Sometimes retelling a story shows comprehension, while other times creating a timeline of events works. In SEL, assessing a student may share a story to show how a character made a decision and the impact of that decision on others. The next time the student might act out different scenarios.

In classrooms where SEL is integrated daily as a lived experience, it is normal to see students using rubrics to determine how they are progressing. They might be comparing their work to an exemplar or watching a video of students engaged in social interactions and talking to peers about what is appropriate or not. When receiving teacher input, students use feedback and feed forward to improve their learning. They can explain what the feedback means and how they use it. Students take responsibility for their own learning and track their progress over time.

DREAM OR REALITY?

Integrating SEL through everyday assessment is not a dream. You already do it. Every day in classrooms across the United States, caring, dedicated teachers advocate for their students. They show their passion for their calling through the hundreds of decisions they make, the care they take, the questions they ask, and the support they give. However, if Social Emotional Learning is to

FIGURE 2.1 ● Learner Centered Assessment



Modeled to Support: Cross, K. P., & Angelo, T. A. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. Ann Arbor, MI: National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning. University of Michigan.

succeed it deserves to be an integrated practice that is recognized for what it does.

Social Emotional Learning research clearly shows that SEL competencies impact student learning, behavior, self-management, and more. The findings of a significant meta-analysis that included research with more than 270,000 students revealed the following:

1. Compared to students who did not engage, SEL treatments targeting the five core competencies improved students' academic achievement by 11 percentile points.
2. Students who took part in SEL programs had improved conduct in the classroom, an enhanced capacity for handling stress and despair, and improved attitudes about themselves, other people, and education.
3. Further meta-analyses confirmed the same results. Consistency across independent study teams provides compelling evidence that successfully implemented SEL programs are advantageous (CASEL, 2023).

We believe that integrating Social Emotional Learning via content and assessments every day is the most effective strategy for increasing both adult and student SEL competencies. We know that teachers already do this. However, in order for SEL to flourish, SEL integration needs to be a systematic process that is intentional

(see Figure 2.1). Gathering evidence of SEL success provides stakeholders with real data. SEL works!



Practitioner “Wondering” Reflection

Time for Your SEL Reflection Journal

In your SEL Journal reflect on what you have learned in this chapter. Consider these prompts:

- My biggest “aha” in this chapter was . . .
- One strategy, idea, or activity I will immediately implement is . . .
- One thing I am not quite clear on is . . .
- What I am curious about is . . .



Takeaway to Practice

What is the one takeaway from this chapter you want to put into action? Name it. Add it to your action plan.