



by Anita M. Cellucci, March 2020

As a district, we are continuing our focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) and ways to integrate approaches for reaching all students into our K-12 curriculum. At the elementary level, this is through an SEL curriculum. For high school students, we are looking at organic ways to include these skills in our current curriculum. In the past, I have focused on bridging research with the five SEL competencies throughout the process of research. In my school, there are several research projects that have grown into full-length inquiry projects that stretch over two to three weeks and follow the Guided Inquiry Design® process phases. In the past several years, I have witnessed the path of emotions that students and educators journey through as we work daily through the challenges of information literacy, research, analysis, and problem solving.

In thinking about the SEL competencies, the CASEL Secondary Guide points out the following:

The knowledge, skills, and attitudes within the CASEL five competency clusters are especially critical during adolescence because youth at this stage are going through rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. These changes create unique opportunities for personal and social skill development. Adolescents also engage in more risky behavior than younger students and face a variety of challenging situations, including increased independence, peer pressure, and exposure to social media. Longitudinal studies have shown that increased social and emotional competence is related to reductions in a variety of problem behaviors including aggression, delinquency, substance use, and dropout (<https://casel.org/resources/>).

High school is prime time to delve deeper into the SEL competencies in a way that provides for authentic growth and learning.

At first glance, the SEL competencies are not necessarily obvious in relation to teaching research, but as I continue to think about the research process and the competencies, I see the alignment more clearly and have taken the time with other educators to discuss ways to integrate lessons, skills, and reflections within research projects and in the context of SEL. Throughout the research process students are asked to identify problems, analyze information, and come up with solutions to the problem presented within the research. In order for students to do so effectively, it is important that SEL skills are embedded throughout the practice. If we think about the competencies one at a time and identify ways that skills can be taught within this context, we will have a clearer vision of this implementation.

As an example, self-awareness is the learning competency based on the idea that having self-awareness allows for recognition of one's own emotions, thoughts, and values to understand how they influence our personal growth and understanding. When thinking about inquiry research, it is often true that students have not been offered an opportunity to think about personal beliefs, thoughts, and understandings as they relate to their learning. By embedding time for this process, we allow students to begin to identify their strengths, values, and individual thinking in relation to the research topic. It is my experience that educators are often surprised that students may not be able to articulate their interests and opinions.

The learning competency that has similar language for a typical research process is the Responsible Decision-Making competency. Responsible decision-making focuses on personal behavior, social interactions, and the associated consequences, such as identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, and ethical responsibility. All of these competencies directly relate to the skills necessary for students to participate in higher-order thinking within the research process. This competency asks students to move beyond self and to fully reflect on how their actions affect others.

There is a broad opportunity for discussion with educators and administrators about SEL through the research process. These conversations can begin with exploring how

the research process and embedding these skills can easily overlap with assisting our students in becoming not only more academically advanced but also furthering their growth in mindset and emotions in a healthy and rewarding way. This benefits all students as well as educators when we consider the implications of co-teaching, mentoring, and building an empathetic community.

Work Cited

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Resource Library. <https://casel.org/resources/>

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