



SEL Helps Valued Outcomes to Happen: A Series of Examples...

Enriching Visual and Performing Arts Education by Embedding SEL

As students, faculty, and staff begin a new academic year, it is nearly impossible to overstate the need for intentional social-emotional learning opportunities within schools, and, more broadly, the community. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, greater emphasis upon social-emotional learning (SEL) has been a consistent theme. The global health crisis has demonstrated the urgent need for social-emotional competence (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) in order to navigate many of the challenges and inequities that have been exacerbated during this time. These competencies don't simply "emerge" as students develop artistic literacy, any more than math, science, or artistic skills "emerge." And yet, the start to this academic year brings an unprecedented opportunity to bring SEL competencies to students in lasting, thoughtful, and intentional ways.

Because many students connect with and relate to the visual and performing arts, this curriculum area is ideal for embedding social-emotional learning within academic content. Utilizing frameworks established in New Jersey for Arts Education and Social-Emotional Learning, arts educators can now rely on common vocabulary, as well as relevant Enduring Understandings (EUs) and Essential Questions (EQs), to activate students' social emotional competence while building literacy in the arts. The Framework is a tool intended to assist educators as they embed SEL into curriculum and instruction, in support of culturally relevant arts education practices that center on the needs of students. By embedding SEL into arts education with greater intention, arts educators can engage students in impactful learning experiences that are grounded in the four artistic processes—Create, Perform, Respond, and Connect—while also building students' social-emotional competence in meaningful, developmental learning experiences. Intentional implementation of artistic SEL prioritizes development of artistic literacy and fluency as well as students' social-emotional development; academic and SEL goals are complementary.

Designing learning environments that provide opportunities for inquiry is one way that arts educators routinely convey that SEL is central to both creating and responding to artistic works. As a pathway to deeper learning, this helps students to understand that creativity relies on practices that can be honed through meaningful developmental experiences in the arts. Let's take an example from the curriculum resources that can be found at selarts.org. An arts educator might choose to focus on the essential question: *How does engaging in the arts help one identify their own thoughts, feelings, and the perspectives of others?* as a way of embedding SEL into academic content. By doing so, they can provide

students with structured and constructive processes to identify, for example, how the arts served to stave off feelings of isolation and deepen their connection with others throughout the pandemic, or helped them experience joy. Students might then incorporate their reflections into the creation of a self-portrait, a monologue, a short documentary, an original dance or musical composition, to express their emotions in a tangible way.

When educators are intentional about activating SEL within arts education environments and invite learners to explore the social-emotional terrain of their own lived experience more fully, students have a place to flourish and find expression for their authentic voice. It is through intentional and sustained implementation of artistic SEL that arts educators throughout the PreK-16 spectrum can offer student artists safe and welcoming environments to develop the sense of identity, belonging, and agency needed to navigate the complexities of life they encounter daily.

The various forms of arts education in each artistic discipline offer distinct ways to help students reflect upon and learn about themselves and others, which are important SEL competencies. When artistic forms and social-emotional learning are paired explicitly in complementary ways, students can develop the foundation necessary to navigate the complexities they will face throughout life; they develop constructive pathways for healing when faced with trauma; and persistence in the face of challenges. As they become better able to envision solutions as a result of deeper learning, they carry this confidence and competence in all other areas of their lives, including the rest of their academic curricula.

(This article has been adapted from the June 2021 [Heart of the Arts](#) Brief.)

This information sheet was provided by SEL4NJ, the Social-Emotional Learning Alliance of NJ, a voluntary, grass-roots organization working with schools and communities to promote social-emotional and character development and supportive, engaging, inclusive, equitable classroom and school environments for learning. Prepared by Kira Rizzuto, Director of Programs & Partnerships, ArtsEdSEL and Program Development Manager, Arts Ed NJ. You can reach us at info@sel4nj.org and join at www.SEL4NJ.org.