

# WHAT DOES SEL LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

BY NICK YODER AND LIZ NOLAN

Many teachers and administrators recognize the importance of social and emotional development for student success inside and outside of school. However, they often feel as though they do not have the time or tools to support social and emotional learning (SEL) (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013; DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017).

In our work with schools, we are frequently asked, “What does SEL look like in the classroom — both in teacher implementation and student behavior?” and “How can we facilitate discussions and strategies that simultaneously build students’ social, emotional, and academic growth?”

The American Institutes for Research developed the *Social and Emotional Learning Coaching Toolkit: Keeping SEL at the Center* (Yoder & Gurke, 2017) to answer those questions and help schools embed SEL into academic instruction. This tool kit is designed to support coaches and administrators as they facilitate teachers’ learning about SEL practices through planning, classroom observations, reflective feedback, and action planning (the coaching cycle). The tool kit is most useful when it aligns with other professional learning opportunities for SEL, including professional learning communities where teachers can share their strategies and challenges with one another.

Built into the tool kit is the understanding that, if we want

## GET THE TOOLS

*Social and Emotional Learning Coaching Toolkit: Keeping SEL at the Center* is available at [www.air.org/resource/social-and-emotional-learning-coaching-toolkit](http://www.air.org/resource/social-and-emotional-learning-coaching-toolkit).

teachers to support students’ social and emotional development, we first need to consider coaching as an SEL process for adults. Coaching is a way to support teachers as they work through the challenge of change, and effective coaching considers the humanness of teachers and incorporates best practices of SEL. It creates safe and supportive spaces for teachers to reflect on their existing practices, let go of the old ways, step out of their comfort zones, endure uncertainty, and try out new practices (Bridges, 2009).

As part of the tool kit, we developed a rubric for observing and recording teacher implementation of each practice. Here we present a modified tool that incorporates two components of the rubric. The left column describes indicators that reflect high-quality implementation for each practice, including both teacher behaviors and corresponding student behaviors that would be expected if teachers are implementing the practices with high quality. The middle column provides a space to record the teacher’s performance level. Finally, the right

column includes discussion questions tied to each practice that can be used for planning, feedback, and reflection between coaches and teachers.

It is important to note that you should not expect to observe all of the practices in the same lesson. Coaches and teachers may want to work together to identify focus areas and specific targeted practices before the observation.

## REFERENCES

- Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M., & Hariharan, A. (2013).** *The missing piece: A national teacher survey on how social and emotional learning can empower children and transform schools.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.
- Bridges, W. (2009).** *Managing transitions: Making the most of change.* Philadelphia, PA: DeCapo Press.
- DePaoli, J.L., Atwell, M.N., & Bridgeland, J. (2017).** *Ready to lead: A national principal survey on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.
- Yoder, N. & Gurke, D. (2017).** *Social and emotional learning coaching toolkit: Keeping SEL at the Center.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

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## MODIFIED OBSERVATION TOOL

### RUBRIC DESCRIPTION

For each targeted SEL practice, select the performance level that best reflects the evidence you collected while observing the teacher:

1. SEL practice **is not yet present** in the classroom. Neither the teacher nor the students demonstrate any of the behaviors associated with the practice.
2. SEL practice **is minimally present** in the classroom. The teacher and students demonstrate some of the behaviors associated with the practice but only a small number of times throughout the lesson.
3. SEL practice **is moderately present** in the classroom. The teacher and students demonstrate some of the behaviors associated with the practice but inconsistently so throughout the lesson.
4. SEL practice **is fully present** in the classroom. The teacher and students demonstrate the behaviors associated with the practice consistently across the lesson.

DESCRIPTION OF SEL PRACTICE	Score (1-4)	Questions for planning and debriefing
<b>1. Student-centered discipline refers to the types of classroom management strategies teachers use.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: The teacher has discussions with students about classroom procedures, including incorporating student voice with the rules and procedures of the classroom. The teacher provides students strategies so that they can monitor and regulate their behavior and emotions in the classroom. The teacher consistently implements classroom rules and consequences but also considers pupil-specific factors when trying to help students correct their behavior.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how you create a classroom environment to encourage student engagement. What norms and values do you discuss with students? Do these include high expectations, respect, and caring for all students?</li> <li>• Describe how you create a classroom environment that incorporates student interests and experiences.</li> <li>• Describe ways you help students identify and articulate their feelings.</li> <li>• How do you help students learn to regulate their behavior (e.g. when others do something they do not like)?</li> <li>• Describe how you respond to students' misbehavior. Which strategies have you found are most effective/ineffective?</li> <li>• Describe approaches you take to assist students who have a difficult time following behavioral expectations.</li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students exhibit positive classroom behaviors, regulating their own behaviors and emotions in the classroom. If students misbehave, they have tools and strategies to accept the consequences of their behavior, problem solve situations that may arise in the future, and articulate how their behavior influences the ways the classroom operates.</p>		
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>Source: Yoder, N. &amp; Gurke, D. (2017).</b> <i>Social and emotional learning coaching toolkit: Keeping SEL at the center.</i> Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.</p>		

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<b>2. <u>Teacher language</u> refers to how teachers talk to students.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: The teacher acknowledges specific positive behaviors and asks students to reflect on their behavior — both social skills and work habits. The teacher also provides specific affirmation to let students know their efforts lead to positive results.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how you communicate encouragement to motivate your students.</li> <li>• Describe how you communicate desirable outcomes for behavior and academic performance (e.g. positive behaviors, academic performance).</li> <li>• How do you help your students use language effectively?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How do you enable your students to use language to monitor and regulate their own behavior? To work well with others and resolve interpersonal conflict?</li> <li>– What opportunities do you provide your students to develop, practice, and improve their academic language?</li> <li>– Describe how you address the cultural and linguistic differences in language between you and your students and among your students. What do you do if socioeconomic, linguistic, or cultural language differences lead to confusion or misunderstanding?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students use positive language with the teacher and their peers, including appropriate academic language. Students become more motivated, persist in tasks, and modify or continue positive behaviors based on the language the teacher uses in the classroom.</p>		
<b>3. <u>Responsibility and choice</u> refers to how students are allowed to make decisions.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: The teacher engages students in how they are going to learn. The teacher asks for student input, provides meaningful choices, and creates opportunities for students to be responsible in the classroom. The teacher ensures that students make connections between their choices and potential consequences.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you help students take responsibility for their actions or connect actions to potential consequences?</li> <li>• How do you model and encourage learning from mistakes (both behavioral and academic)?</li> <li>• Describe a time when you integrated student choice into a lesson. How often do you provide similar opportunities to your students?</li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students have opportunities to be responsible within lessons as well as classroom procedures. Students are aware that there are multiple ways to solve a problem. Students accept responsibility for their own behavior and the class's behavior, holding each other accountable. They also have opportunities to help their peers and teacher.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the barriers to incorporating more student choice? How can you overcome those barriers?</li> <li>• How do you help students take responsibility for their actions or connect actions to potential consequences?</li> </ul>

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<b>4. Warmth and support refers to the academic, social, and emotional support students receive from their teacher and peers.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: The teacher demonstrates that he or she appreciates each student as an individual and is concerned about how and what each student learns. The classroom is structured so students feel included and appreciated, creating a space where it is OK to make mistakes and where the teacher checks in with students about academic and nonacademic concerns.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do students feel valued, respected, and supported by their peers in your classroom? How do you know that?</li> <li>• What opportunities do you provide for students to develop and foster positive relationships with their peers?</li> <li>• Think about a lesson from this past week. Did the lesson offer students the opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions in a respectful environment?</li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students express academic and emotional support for their teacher and peers. Students know about each other's interests and backgrounds and take into account the perspective and emotions of their classmates and teacher. Students communicate with each other in meaningful ways and feel comfortable taking academic risks.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you acknowledge and support the concerns of students, whether academic, social, or emotional?</li> </ul>
<b>5. Cooperative learning refers to a specific instructional task in which students work together toward a collective goal.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: The teacher creates learning experiences in which the students apply positive social skills to succeed, depend on each other, and work through difficulties they may have with assignments. Individual students and the group are held accountable for learning during small-group work. In addition, the teacher provides opportunities for students to share their work, receive feedback from others, and collaboratively process how they work together.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you use cooperative learning in your classroom? Is there a particular model or approach that you use? Which elements do you use (interdependence, accountability, team encouragement, social skills, group processing)?</li> <li>• How do you encourage students to collaborate with one another, particularly when they are having difficulty with classroom content?</li> <li>• How do you ensure that students have the appropriate social and emotional skills (e.g. communication, self-regulation) to successfully accomplish group tasks?</li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students work with their peers in meaningful ways and hold each other accountable during group work. Students process how they work together and focus on promoting the group's success. Students provide specific, high-quality feedback to each other and are receptive to feedback from their peers. Students resolve conflict that arises during cooperative learning.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you help students provide and receive feedback from their peers?</li> </ul>

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<b>6. Classroom discussions refers to conversations students and teachers have about content.</b>		
<p><b>TEACHER PRACTICE:</b> The teacher helps students identify how to listen to, respond to, and learn from other students in a discussion. The teacher helps students learn how to effectively communicate their point of view, allowing students to hold in-depth discussions about content and reflecting on their peers' thoughts.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you incorporate questioning techniques into your lesson plans?</li> <li>• Think about a lesson from this past week. How did the lesson offer students the opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions in a respectful environment?</li> <li>• What kinds of questions do your students ask?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Do student-generated questions move beyond simple clarifications to more complex questions that prompt further, more sophisticated reflection?</li> <li>– How can you help your students learn the skills to ask more complex questions?</li> <li>– To what extent does your instruction facilitate thoughtful classroom discussions by developing the listening skills of students? By building their skills to conduct inquiry? Their ability to collaborate with others to arrive at a deeper understanding or a decision?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>STUDENT BEHAVIORS:</b> Students listen attentively and can paraphrase and analyze the speaker's main points as well as extend their own thinking in response. Students can ask clarifying questions as well as use effective communication skills to present their own point of view and reflect on their peers' points of view.</p>		
<b>7. Self-assessment and self-reflection refers to teachers and students actively thinking about their own work.</b>		
<p><b>TEACHER PRACTICE:</b> The teacher is clear about the learning goals and asks students to reflect on and monitor their progress toward meeting those goals — both social and academic. The teacher ensures that students have time to analyze their own work, think together about the effectiveness of learning activities, and provide feedback for improvement.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about your most successful lessons in the past two weeks:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How did you ensure that your students learned, and how did you know that your students understood the learning goals? How did you help them reflect on their progress in understanding the learning goals?</li> <li>– How did you help your students reflect on their behavior (both positive and negative)?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What self-assessment techniques did you use most frequently in the past two weeks?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Describe how you used the results of student self-assessment to inform your practice.</li> <li>– Describe how you helped students use the results of their self-assessment to inform their learning.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>STUDENT BEHAVIORS:</b> Students understand their goals and actively think about how their work is related to achieving them. Students are able to monitor progress and know where to go when they need assistance. Students are able to identify what they do and do not know as well as effective strategies for learning. They can provide feedback on how strategies are working for them.</p>		

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<b>8. <u>Balanced instruction</u> refers to the balance between active and direct instruction as well as individual and collaborative learning.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: The teacher uses multiple instructional practices to keep students engaged, knowing when to best use direct instruction and when to use active engagement activities. The teacher asks students to extend their learning when they provide simple answers. In addition, they have students work on real-world products that not only are fun but also represent one of the best ways for students to learn.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you define “active instruction”?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How do you use active instruction in your classroom to ensure students understand the content? Engage in the content?</li> <li>– What types of instructional strategies do you use in your classroom to engage students? How do you integrate multiple strategies into a lesson or unit?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What types of products do you ask your students to develop to demonstrate their work?</li> <li>• How do you ensure that you use the correct balance of direct and active instruction for you and your students?</li> <li>• What types of strategies do you employ to help students solve problems throughout the learning process?</li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students interact with content in multiple ways, actively solving problems and working both independently and collaboratively. Students identify challenges in solving problems and find potential solutions. Students create products for different audiences and develop an understanding that these audiences may require different communication strategies.</p>		
<b>9. <u>Academic press and expectations</u> refers to the implementation of meaningful and challenging work and expecting that students will succeed.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: Students are given more challenging work once they have mastered easier material, ensuring that students feel responsible for their successes and their failures and that they understand the connection between effort and results. The teacher supports students socially and emotionally while challenging them to achieve and surpass their goals.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you know where each student’s level of academic challenge is — and keep the student moving forward?</li> <li>• What tells you that your students have understood the relationship between the effort they make and their ability to move to a higher level of achievement/challenge?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How do you help students regulate their emotions (e.g. frustration) when they are presented with more rigorous content?</li> <li>– What skills are students learning to manage their social or emotional responses to rigorous academic content?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What learning skills are you teaching and modeling to help students manage their social or emotional responses to rigorous academic content?</li> <li>• How do you help students feel responsible for accomplishing work that meets high expectations? How does the school culture support academic press and expectations? How does a school culture of high expectations support students’ social and academic growth?</li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students feel a need to succeed as they work to master increasingly challenging material. Students understand that they are responsible for their academic outcomes and can analyze information to solve problems. They are able to identify and regulate their emotions when facing new challenges and barriers to success.</p>		

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<b>10. Competence building refers to using the instructional cycle to develop social and emotional skills.</b>		
<p>TEACHER PRACTICE: The teacher uses a variety of tools to model and practice new learning with students. The teacher has students correct mistakes and improve their work using multiple strategies, including relevant feedback from both the teacher and their peers. The teacher uses student misconceptions to guide instruction without singling out individual students.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you help build your students' social and emotional competencies throughout academic instruction? What additional ways can you brainstorm to accomplish this in your daily practice?</li> <li>• How do you model and encourage prosocial behaviors throughout your instruction?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How do you incorporate feedback on your students' behavior into the normal course of instruction?</li> <li>– What do you do if a student needs extended coaching in a social and emotional competency?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How do you model and encourage learning from mistakes (both behavioral and academic)?</li> <li>• What types of strategies do you employ to help students solve problems throughout the learning process?</li> <li>• What opportunities do you provide students to take responsibility in the classroom and in their learning?</li> </ul>
<p>STUDENT BEHAVIORS: Students are engaged with the content throughout the entire instructional cycle. Students use support and feedback from teachers and peers to improve their work, and they recognize that this is an important part of the learning process, especially when they notice mistakes. Students are aware of their emotions and behaviors during instruction, and they respond appropriately.</p>		