Social Emotional Learning in the Writing Classroom: Some Successful Activity Ideas

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Abstract

In this online poster presentation, I will share with teachers classroom activities that serve the dual purpose of (a) promoting student social emotional learning (SEL) and (b) advancing student writing competencies. The presentation will focus on three activities that I have recently used with secondary-level English learner students in the United States. For each activity, I will introduce the materials and explain the SEL/language learning objectives. Samples of student work will be provided. The first activity is a weekly self-affirmation exercise which supports student awareness of sentence types (e.g., simple, compound, complex). The second activity is a goal-setting activity that activates student mastery of writing conventions (e.g., subject-verb agreement, capitalization, etc.). The third activity is a coping exercise where students practice sentence design. In closing, I will provide attendees with a full set of SEL competencies so that they may create related activities for their classrooms.

--**Bryan Meadows (Independent Scholar, Korea)**

Objective of Poster Presentation: Share classroom activities that serve a dual purpose of...

Promoting student Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

- What is SEL?
  - A set of 5 competencies that include (a) Self-Awareness, (b) Self-Management, (c) Social Awareness, (d) Relationship Skills, and (e) Responsible Decision-Making
  - Explicit teaching of competencies is linked to short-term and long-term benefits for K-12 students (Act for Youth, 2022; Jones *et al.*, 2015 as cited in NCSL, 2022)
  - Additional indications that SEL competencies can promote success with language learning for post-secondary students (Zaimoglu & Sahinkarakas, 2021)

[[Also see Meadows (2023)]]

Advancing student writing competencies using English

- What are writing competencies?
  - Competencies to produce academic English writing along three dimensions of...
    - WORD-LEVEL: selection of technical terms and showing awareness of nuance/connotation in word choice
    - SENTENCE-LEVEL: construction of sentences in a variety of types (e.g., simple, compound, complex, etc.) and while showing mastery of language conventions (e.g., subject-verb agreement, verb forms, pronoun usage, punctuation, etc.)
    - PARAGRAPH-LEVEL: construction of paragraphs that follow academic conventions (e.g., transitional phrases, conventions of sequencing) and which show elaboration and specificity as demanded by academic disciplines (WIDA, 2020).

More detail of SEL competencies (CASEL, 2020)

Competency	Definition	Sample Indicators
SELF-AWARENESS	Abilities to understand one's emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts	Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets Linking feelings, values, and thoughts Having a growth mindset
SELF-MANAGEMENT	Abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations	Identifying and using stress-management strategies Setting personal and collective goals Using planning and organizational skills
SOCIAL AWARENESS	Abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts	Taking the perspectives of others Demonstrating empathy and compassion Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	Abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups	Developing positive relationships and resisting negative social pressure Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving Seeking or offering support and help when needed
RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	Abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations	Learning to make reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school

Overview of 3 classroom activities designed for secondary students (in the United States) to advance SEL and Writing Competencies

Activity #1: Weekly Self-Affirmation Writing Task

Activity #2: My Monthly Goal Writing Task

Activity #3: My Positive Self-Talk Space Slide Deck

Activity #1: Weekly Self-Affirmation Writing Task

- **SEL Learning Objective:** Students develop abilities towards two SEL competencies of *self-awareness* and *self-management*.

- **Writing Competency Learning Objective:** Students develop fluency in recognizing sentence types (e.g., simple, compound, and complex).
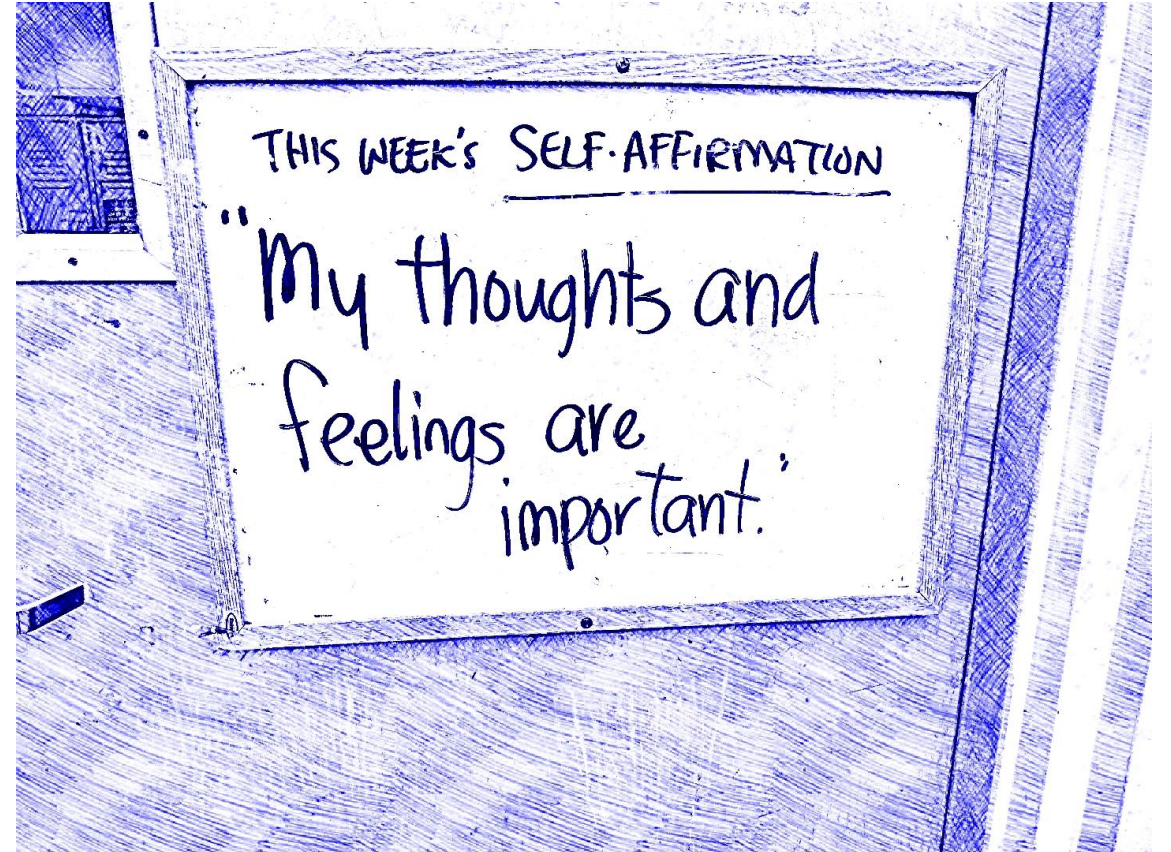
Activity #1: Weekly Self-Affirmation Writing Task

- **Procedure**: What do the students do?
  - The teacher starts every week with this 10-15 minute writing task to open class. Prior to class, the teacher selects one self-affirmation to be the focus of this week's writing.
  - For the 10-15 minute writing task, students complete a half-page writing template that features three writing prompts:
    - (1) Students copy the self-affirmation in English;
    - (2) Students translate the self-affirmation into their home language; and
    - (3) Students select how they agree with the self-affirmation when thinking about themselves (e.g., strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree)
  - Students complete the same writing task at the end of the week for reinforcement and to check student growth towards the self-affirmation (i.e., do they identify more closely with the self-affirmation statement at the end of the week compared to the start?)

Writing Task Template

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

CLASS PERIOD: 1 2 3 TEACHER: _____

Self-Affirmation Check-In

What is the self-affirmation statement this week? Copy it in the space below.

_____

Please explain the self-affirmation in another language you know.

_____

Do you agree with the self-affirmation statement? Circle one option below:

Strongly disagree   Disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree

Click here for a copy of the template.

Activity #1: Some sample self-affirmation statements

1. I get better every day.
2. I am in charge of my choices.
3. I only compare myself to me.
4. I am a work in progress.
5. I deserve respect, and I can give respect to others.
6. I can learn English with practice.
7. Knowing two languages helps me understand different cultures.
8. I am successful in school because I give my best effort.
9. I am thankful for the support I receive from others.
10. I am ready for a new challenge.

Activity #1: Weekly Self-Affirmation Writing Task

- Modifications are always possible
  - The writing prompts can be changed to require more student elaboration
  - The self-affirmation statements can be modified to fit particular sentence types: simple, compound, complex – thus providing beginner students with model sentences to learn from
  - The writing task between the beginning of the week and the end of the week could be differentiated; the students could write more and make explicit reflections on how their perspectives have changed (or not) over the course of the week
  - Finally, the featured self-affirmation statement each week could be a source of journal writing/reflection during weekly lessons. This will keep the theme on the minds of the students from the start to the end of the week.

Activity #2: My Monthly Goal Writing Task

- **SEL Learning Objective:** Students develop abilities towards the SEL competency of *self-management.*

- **Writing Competency Learning Objective:** Students develop towards mastery of writing conventions at the sentence level (e.g., sentence-verb agreement, capitalization, spelling, transition words, etc.)

Activity #2: My Monthly Goal Writing Task

- **Procedure**: What do the students do?
  - At the start of each month, students complete a "My Monthly Goal" brief writing task.
  - In the writing task, students respond to a series of questions surrounding a monthly goal: What is it? How will they reach their goal? Why is this goal important?
  - The students submit the writing task to the teacher for feedback. The teacher evaluates the writing submission for writing conventions and gives suggested edits.
  - Students revise their writing and prepare it for public display.
  - Students post their monthly goal statement on the wall

- **Optional follow-up:** Teachers provide students a chance at the end of the month to write a reflection on their monthly goal: Did they make progress towards their goal? How do they know? This writing task requires full paragraphs from students and therefore is not evaluated individually for writing conventions by the teacher.

Writing Task Template

My Monthly Goal:

NAME:

GOAL:
My goal is to + VERB _____.

Why this is important to me:
This is important to me for ____ reasons. First, _____. Second, _____

How I will make progress:
I will make progress ____ ways. First, _____. Also, ____. Finally, _____.

Self-affirmation statement to keep me going:

An image to go with this goal:

Click here for a copy of the template.

# Activity #3: My Positive Self-Talk Space Slide Deck

- **SEL Learning Objective:** Students develop abilities towards the SEL competency of *self-management.*

- **Writing Competency Learning Objective:** Beginner language learner students develop awareness of sentence type (e.g., simple, compound, complex)

- **Procedure (1)**: What do the students do?
  - The teacher presents beginner language learner students with a list of self-affirmation statements. The statements are written as simple, compound, and as complex sentences.
  - After highlighting the sentence components (e.g., subject-predicate clauses), the students select 4-5 of the self-affirmation statements that they most identify with.
  - Next, the teacher introduces the distinction between negative self-talk and positive self-talk. The teacher uses some of the self-affirmation statements to illustrate examples of positive self-talk. (These are contrasted against negative self-talk examples created by the teacher.)
  - Next, the teacher introduces their "Positive Self-Talk Slide Deck" that they have constructed beforehand. Each slide features an image and one self-affirmation statement from the list given to students earlier.

Activity #3: My Positive Self-Talk Space Slide Deck

Slide Deck SAMPLE (cover page)
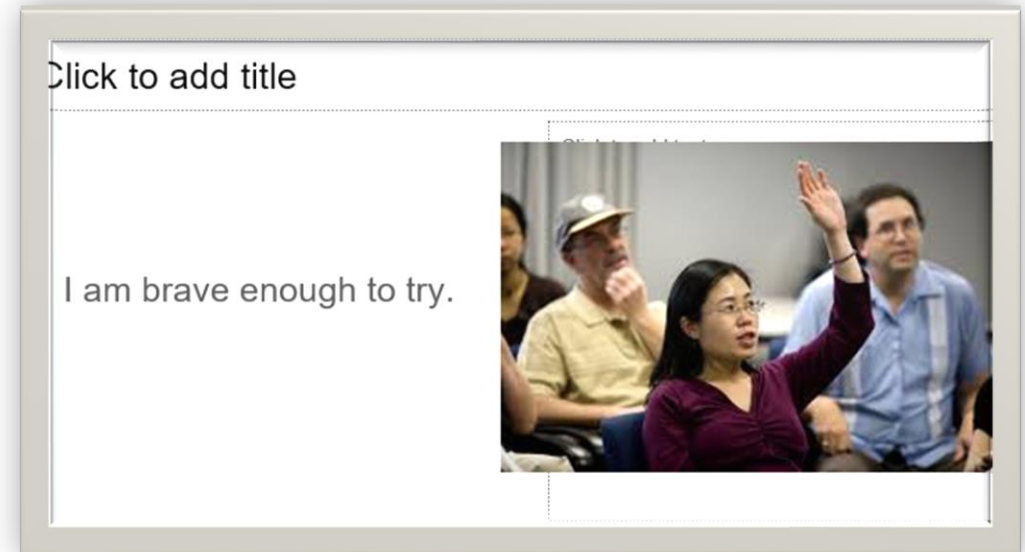
My Positive Self-Talk Space

Click to add subtitle
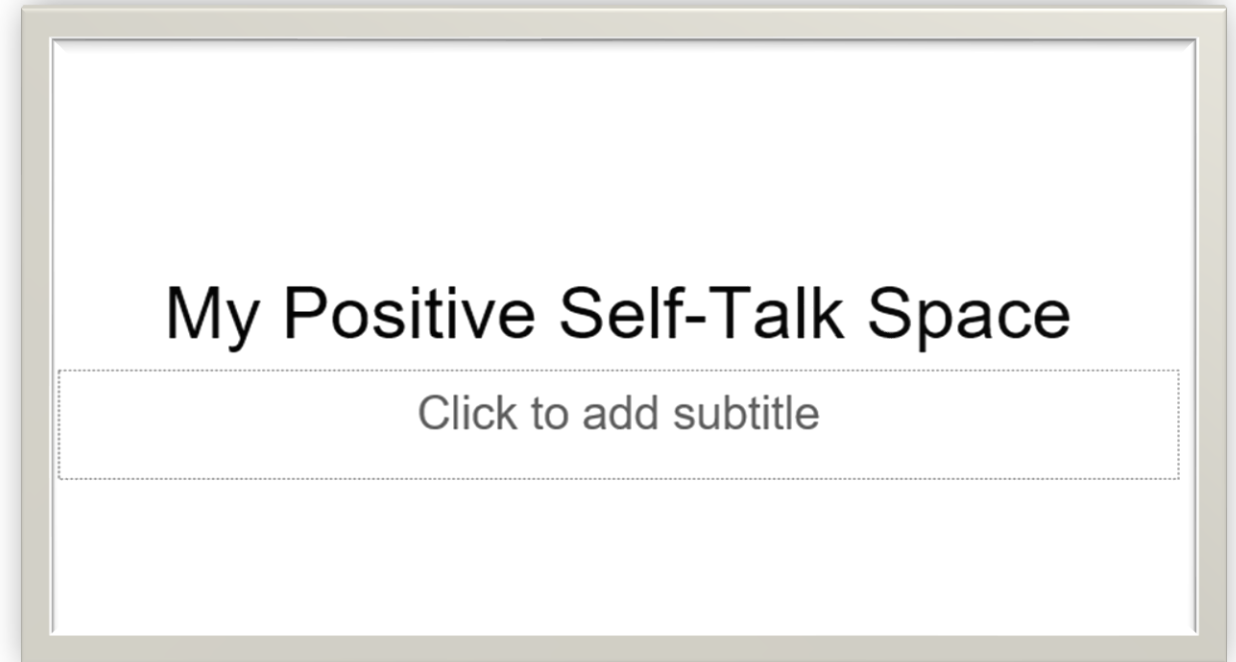
Click here for a copy of the slide deck sample.

- **Procedure (2)**: What do the students do?
  - Students next work on their slide deck, selecting self-affirmation statements and images to fill each one. One extension is for students to underscore the subject and predicate in each self-affirmation statement or to simply label each one as either simple, compound, or complex.
  - Students save the slide decks on their laptop desktop for regular access during their studies. The teacher encourages them to refer back to the positive self-talk slide deck whenever they recognize that they are using negative self-talk.

Activity #3: My Positive Self-Talk Space Slide Deck

Slide Deck SAMPLE (cover page)

Click to add title

I am brave enough to try.

Click here for a copy of the slide deck sample.

Activity #3: My Positive Self-Talk Space Slide Deck

- To the right are sample self-affirmation statements students can incorporate into their Positive Self-Talk Slide Deck.

- For the list of statements as a handout, follow this link [here](#).

Sample Self-Affirmation Statements

- 1. I am enough.

- 2. I get better every day.

- 3. I am good at gaining new knowledge.

- 4. It's okay not knowing everything right now. I can learn.

- 5. A "failure" is a chance to grow and learn.

- 6. I am grateful.

- 7. I can do what I focus my mind on.

- 8. I trust myself.

- 9. I can forgive myself and others for not being perfect.

- 10. All I need is within me right now.

- 11. My people believe in me.

In closing, here is a link to the CASEL SEL competencies.

CASEL'S SEL FRAMEWORK:
What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where Are They Promoted?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.

• Teachers are invited to use the competencies as a basis for creating their own SEL-writing activities for their classrooms.

THANK YOU

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