

## **Social Emotional Learning (SEL) (Kelly Young)**

### **Importance and Definition**

Scholars and educators have recently gained interest in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to develop the whole student in areas beyond cognitive capacity. Increased SEL skills are linked to improvements in student stress levels and general well-being, enhanced coping skills, and less alcohol and drug abuse and aggression (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). Additionally, organizations like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are investigating the value of SEL skills in improving and sustaining civil society (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019). Overall, there are several benefits associate with improving students' SEL skills. Many of these skills can be improved through practice in competitive debate.

While there is little doubt in the importance of SEL, there is a debate about what constitutes SEL. Generally, SEL includes social and emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, and student well-being. Despite some differences in definition, there is general agreement that educators should focus on student well-being and skills that “enhance resilience and good mental health” (Hromek & Roffey, 2009, p. 627). One of the more widely recognized studies on SEL comes from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2018), which defines SEL as a set of social and emotional skills:

the abilities to regulate one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour. These skills differ from cognitive abilities such as literacy or numeracy because they mainly concern how people manage their emotions, perceive themselves and engage with others, rather than indicating their raw ability to process information. But, like literacy and numeracy, they are dependent on situational factors and responsive to change and development through

formal and informal learning experiences. Importantly, social and emotional skills influence a wide range of personal and societal outcomes throughout one's life.

Another highly respected organization, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2013), describes SEL as trainable skills that can be acquired “to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

One of the most widely recognized and researched frameworks for SEL was created by the OECD (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019). Referred to as the “Big Five Model,” the OECD (2018) has articulated five core SEL skill sets with several subskills. A sixth category, “compound skills,” is a mixture of several SEL skill categories and other cognitive skills. Below are the Big Five areas plus Compound Skills, as described by the OECD (2018).

### **Big Five SEL categories (and Compound Skills)**

#### Task Performance (conscientiousness)

- Achievement orientation (setting high standards for oneself and working hard to meet them. E.g., Enjoys reaching a high level of mastery in some activity.)
- Responsibility (Able to honor to commitments, and be punctual and reliable. E.g., arrives on time for appointments, gets chores done right away.)
- Self-control (Able to avoid distractions and focus attention on the current task in order to achieve personal goals. E.g., Doesn't rush into things, is cautious and risk averse.)
- Persistence (Persevering in tasks and activities until they get done. E.g., finishes homework projects or work once started.)

#### Emotional Regulation (Emotional Stability)

- Stress Resistance (Effectiveness in modulating anxiety and able to calmly solve problems (is relaxed, handles stress well). E.g., is relaxed most of the time, performs well in high-pressure situations).
- Optimism (Positive and optimistic expectations for self and life in general. E.g., generally in a good mood.)
- Emotional Control (Effective strategies for regulating temper, anger and irritation in the face of frustrations. E.g., controls emotions in situations of conflict.)

#### Collaboration (Agreeableness)

- Empathy (Kindness and caring for others and their well-being that leads to valuing and investing in close relationships. E.g., consoles a friend who is upset, sympathizes with the homeless.)
- Trust (assuming that others generally have good intentions and forgiving those who have done wrong. E.g., lends things to people, avoids being harsh or judgmental.)
- Cooperation (Living in harmony with others and valuing interconnectedness among all people. E.g., find it easy to get along with people, respects decisions made by a group.)

#### Open-mindedness (Openness to Experience)

- Curiosity (Interest in ideas and love of learning, understanding and intellectual exploration; an inquisitive mindset. E.g., like to read books, to travel to new destinations.)
- Tolerance (Is open to different points of view, values diversity, is appreciative of foreign people and cultures. E.g., have friends from different backgrounds.)

- Creativity (Generating novel ways to do or think about things through exploring, learning from failure, insight and vision. E.g., has original insights, is good at the arts.)

#### Engagement with Others (Extraversion)

- Sociability (Able to approach others, both friends and strangers, initiating and maintaining social connections. E.g., skilled at teamwork, good at public speaking.)
- Assertiveness (Able to confidently voice opinions, needs, and feelings, and exert social influence. E.g., takes charge in a class or team.)
- Energy (Approaching daily life with energy, excitement and spontaneity. E.g., is always busy; works long hours.)

#### Compound Skills (a combination of above skill areas)

- Self-efficacy (The strength of individuals' beliefs in their ability to execute tasks and achieve goals. E.g., remains calm when facing unexpected events.)
- Critical Thinking/Independence (The ability to evaluate information and interpret it through independent and unconstrained analysis. E.g., good at solving problems, at ease in new and unknown situations.) Well documented in many studies (e.g., Colbert (1995)), but particularly Mike Allen et al. (1999) meta study. Debate promotes critical thinking skills more than argumentation and public speaking courses.
- Self-reflection/meta-cognition (Awareness of inner processes and subjective experiences, such as thoughts and feelings, and the ability to reflect on and articulate such experiences. E.g., good exam preparation strategies, able to master skills more effectively.)

## **Mapping SEL to Intercollegiate Debate**

There are several problems with using SEL as a learning outcome. First, there is very limited work on how to assess SEL competence (McKown, 2019). Most of this scholarship is focused on elementary and secondary education. The small amount of scholarship on SEL in higher education does not discuss examples or activities that best promote SEL, making direct comparison to intercollegiate debate difficult. The description of each dimension and subset of SEL skills provided by the OECD (2018) provided some concrete examples that were applicable to intercollegiate debate, but in other instances, particularly those with question marks, it is unclear or perhaps even difficult to associate a specific activity or example with a skill category.

Second, existing research about skills promoted by intercollegiate debate looks at some skill sets that broadly correlate with some of the five dimensions and compound skills of SEL, but do not directly match with the subsets under each dimension. Thus, I created two levels of strength for each subset of skills and their connection to literature: Strong and Weak. For instance, longitudinal survey research conducted by Rogers, Freeman, and Rennels (2017) reveals that survey participants “with debate participation in their backgrounds reported significantly lower-rate increases [of feelings of depression or anxiety] than their non-debate peers”, therefore, “exhibiting a positive outlook” (p. 16). As a result, I described this as a “strong connection” between competitive debate and the subset category of Optimism, under Emotional Regulation. In comparison, a “weak connection” was noted for skill categories that were suggested in research findings but lacked clarity and required a lot of conjecture.

Lastly, and something that will be discussed in the Research Working Group, we do not have enough quality research that tests the relationship between competitive debate and specific skills. The best scholarship we have (e.g., the studies conducted by Rogers) are surveys of

alumni that ask them to self-report on a 5-point Likert scale how effectively debate trained them in broad professional skills. Some of those skills can be associated with SEL, but not easily mapped. More scholarship on this learning outcome within the context of competitive debate would be helpful.

	<b>Strong connection</b>	<b>Weak connection</b>	<b>Related Activity/Exercises</b>	<b>Scholarly Support</b>
<b>Task Performance</b>				
Achievement Orientation	X		Assignment completion. Goal achievement. ??	Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
Responsibility		X	Assignment completion. Goal achievement. ??	Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
Self-Control		X	Assignment completion. Goal achievement. ??	Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
Persistence		X	Assignment completion. Goal achievement. ??	Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>				
Stress Resistance				
Optimism	X		????	Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
Emotional Control				
<b>Collaboration</b>				
Empathy		X	Teamwork	Freeman & Rodgers (2013)
Trust				
Cooperation	X		Teamwork, preparation.	Lux (2014)
<b>Open-Mindedness</b>				
Curiosity	X		Researching, Switch-side debating	Chandler & Hobbs (1991), Lux (2014)
Tolerance	X		Switch-side debating, debating and researching different topics. Researching.	Chandler & Hobbs (1991), Lux (2014), Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
Creativity	X		Argument construction,	Chandler & Hobbs (1991), Lux

			rebuttal strategy. Winning/losing based on strategic choices.	(2014), Hromek & Roffey (2009)
<b>Engagement with Others</b>				
Sociability	x		Teamwork, public speaking, cross examination.	Chandler & Hobbs (1991), Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
Assertiveness		x	Crafting arguments, public speaking, cross examination.	Chandler & Hobbs (1991)
Energy		x	Time spent in preparation	Chandler & Hobbs (1991)
<b>Compound Skills</b>				
Self-efficacy	x		Assignment completion.	Chandler & Hobbs (1991), Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels (2017)
Crit Thinking/Independence	x		Argument construction, researching, refutation, cross examination.	Colbert & Biggers (1985), Allen et al (1999), many others
Self-reflection/meta-cognition	x		Practice/drills, preparing strategies based on feedback from coaches/judges.	Chandler & Hobbs (1991), Hromek & Roffey (2009)

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