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## A Creative Approach to Promoting and Discussing Social Emotional Learning

Lori B. Doyle  
*Concordia University Irvine*, [lori.doyle@cui.edu](mailto:lori.doyle@cui.edu)

Jill L. Swisher  
*Concordia University Irvine*, [jill.swisher@cui.edu](mailto:jill.swisher@cui.edu)

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## **A Creative Approach to Promoting and Discussing Social Emotional Learning**

Teachers inevitably desire to move up on the pay scale and typically do so by taking continuing education in the form of a graduate degree or graduate certificate. School administrators are wise to consider the benefits of encouraging teachers to consider a degree or certificate focused on Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Increased training in SEL for teachers has positive, long-term impacts on schools, which leads to the well-being of teachers and students (Katz et al., 2020). However, administrators are often not familiar with the general tenets of SEL. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate key SEL topics through a series of haiku poems written by the authors of this paper as a way for administrators to become familiar with the best known SEL framework: Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning (CASEL). Administrators and teachers alike can use the haiku poems in secondary ways to creatively introduce SEL concepts during professional development opportunities or parent and community events.

### **Context**

The authors of this paper work at a university with a regional reputation for creating exceptional graduate programs focused on the current needs of school professionals. Neighboring districts approached Concordia University Irvine (CUI) requesting that the School of Education consider offering a program that integrates SEL (Schlichtemeier & Doyle, 2022). The result was a Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership (MAEL) with a specialization in Social Emotional Learning, Character, and Ethics, also offered as a stand-alone graduate certificate option. Bragg et al. (2021) suggested that specific program design elements have the potential to successfully further the blossoming of pedagogical content knowledge. Design elements that contribute to learner satisfaction include practical programming that encourages

the application of acquired knowledge and skills in practice (Bragg et al., 2021). The tenets of SEL were taken very seriously during two years of program approvals and curriculum development, a careful instructor hiring process, and a successful launch of the program. As a way of communicating and sharing the main ideas of the CASEL framework, and to inject a light-hearted approach, the authors of this paper wrote a proposal to present on the CASEL framework using a series of original haiku poems to an audience of school professionals attending a higher education conference in Southern California. The approach and the information presented were well-received which prompted a secondary output, an article encouraging administrators to learn more about SEL in order to provide professional development and ultimately support for teachers to consider continuing education focused on SEL.

### **SEL Through Poetry**

For the purposes of the SEL presentation, the authors decided to abstract and synthesize the key components of the CASEL framework into a kind of conceptual map, a visual and poetic representation of the framework based on relation between key CASEL concepts. As described by Pinto et al. (2008), concepts were selected and listed from the broadest to the most concrete, grouped together according to related concepts, incorporated into groups by areas of overlap, and ordered within a two-dimensional haiku pattern which resulted in data sets of concepts representing corresponding sections from the CASEL framework. Synthesizing, in this case into concise haikus, is an important and helpful process for the presentation of ideas due to the overwhelming amount of information accessible in today's world (Pinot et al., 2008).

The first mode of presenting haiku findings took place at a higher education conference: Critical Questions in Education, held in San Diego, CA in February of 2023. Using haiku as a

form of pedagogy is an awareness raising exercise (Schaefer & Ochiai, 2022). A slideshow presentation was created for the purpose of displaying the haikus as the authors unpacked the CASEL framework, asked questions of the audience, and then opened up the floor for discussion. "The practice of reading haiku for content manifests itself across different modalities and participants (teacher, students) and yet emerges as one unitary event" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 399). Audience members were encouraged to try their hand at writing an original haiku poem on any point that resonated from the presentation and this was done to encourage deep learning on a SEL concept and to show how synthesizing information into a concise haiku poem could facilitate that experience. The practice of *doing* haiku such as for a social activity like this, as opposed to *learning* haiku, leads to intellectual benefits (Nguyen & Roth, 2019).

The following are the main ideas which became data sets or slide titles: Framework Explained, Areas of Competence, Goals, SEL Instruction, and Process. The following sections of this paper will each introduce a general CASEL data set topic and provide the original haiku poems from the conference presentation. Audience members were asked to pay close attention to words in bold font and were prompted to discuss and share ideas through some interactive activities and discussions. The prompts will also be shared within each corresponding section.

### **Framework Explained**

The CASEL framework is often presented as a graph or model used as a visual representation of the major tenets. The model can be helpful when introducing and explaining the overarching framework. An important distinction for administrators to understand is that SEL can have an impact on more than behavior or school culture and, while these would be worth considering as important foci alone, the larger picture is worth mentioning. Hundreds of studies show how an SEL approach can lead to benefits in overall school outcomes, personnel and

student attitudes, engagement on campus, academic performance, and behavior improvements (CASEL, 2023). In a study of over 270,000 students, SEL initiatives led to an 11% improvement in academic success and a 24% improvement in social behaviors (CASEL, 2023). To begin, buy-in from every aspect of a school community is paramount and the following original haiku poems (see Table 1) can provide jumping off points for discussions on ways to foster support from key stakeholders.

**Table 1.**

*Framework explained haiku poems*

C-A-S-E-L: <b>Framework</b> used for S-E-L. Poster for your class?
Framework focus on important <b>communities</b> . Source of great support.
<b>Families</b> are key: school and home in team approach. Can't leave families out!
<b>Caregivers</b> defined: support groups for student growth. Don't forget these peeps!
<b>Schools</b> as second home. Safe havens for many kids. Teachers need support.
<b>Classrooms</b> everywhere. Places where children can go. Individuals.

### **Areas of Competence**

Competence is a key term to consider when unpacking the CASEL framework. The five haiku poems in this section each contain a word or phrase in bold font to indicate an area of competence straight from the framework. The original poetry surrounding each word or phrase represents the authors' intentional extensions to add context and opportunity to the concepts. During the presentation, audience members were asked to consider which area of competence

they felt was either most lacking or most apparent in school-aged students. There was a range of responses, but the overwhelming majority of participants focused on relationship skills as the area of competence most lacking. This information can be used by school administrators as rationale for looking into the range of relationships represented on a school campus. As the authors of the haiku poems indicated, these must include teacher-student as well as peer-to-peer relationships. The following five original haiku poems (see Table 2) were written to add clarity to the five Broad and Interrelated Areas of Competence as noted on the CASEL wheel.

**Table 2.**

*Areas of Competence haiku poems*

<b>Self-awareness</b> top of the framework visual: Metacognition.
<b>Self-management</b> next: Classroom routines and supports help kids monitor.
<b>Decision-making:</b> As in, it's responsible that we focus on.
<b>Relationship skills:</b> teacher to the student, yes. Peer-to-peer, as well
<b>Social awareness:</b> Modeling, reflection, both keys to unlocking.

## **Goals**

When it comes to specific goals, the CASEL framework was written to include academic success, civic engagement, health and wellness, and careers. When the authors-turned-presenters began to discuss CASEL goals, they asked audience members to have a writing utensil in hand and to indicate by each goal a percentage that 1) they felt actually represented the amount of time and effort spent in pursuit of that goal and 2) the amount of time and effort they felt would be

optimal. Directions were to assign a total of 100% split between the four goals. This might be an activity that administrators ask all school personnel to complete as a way of gathering data on current perceptions as well as perceived best practices. The following original haiku poems (see Table 3) were written to elucidate CASEL goals and can be used as a jumping off point for discussion on school-wide goals.

**Table 3.**

*Goals haiku poems*

Do not be afraid. <b>Academic success</b> is still a worthy goal.
Teach them why we care. School and <b>civic engagement</b> on and off campus.
<b>Health and wellness</b> are similar yet not the same. Definitions, please.
College is for some; trades for others. Yet, all want fulfilling <b>careers</b> .

**SEL Instruction**

The CASEL framework was developed as a tool which indicates action. The following section will be focused on ways to incorporate SEL tenets through instruction. As each haiku poem was read aloud by the authors, audience participants were asked to raise their hands to indicate an area where schools are excelling. A converse activity could also prove interesting should an administrator also be seeking data to include perceptions on areas of opportunity. The following original haiku poems (see Table 4) are each focused on one aspect of SEL instruction and the authors purposely injected some fun into the poetry as a nod to an important topic and emerging theme in education research, the pedagogy of play.

**Table 4.**

*SEL instruction haiku poems*

<b>Classroom climate</b> - YAY! Have some fun and make it great, welcoming and cool.
<b>School-wide culture</b> is key to happy people, all. Want to come each day.
<b>School-wide practices</b> create buy-in everywhere for adults and kids.
<b>School-wide policies:</b> Work smarter not harder, y'all. Systems and supports.
This next one is key: <b>Partnerships</b> must always be authentic and real.
Aligned should describe <b>learning opportunities.</b> Get on the same page

**Process**

To continue with actions associated with framework integration, a set of topics was labeled, Process. When presenting this set of poems, the authors instructed listeners to circle or jot down all action words or verbs used to describe the process of SEL integration in schools. A fun and playful tone was also embraced by the authors to show how SEL integration can, indeed, be enjoyable. Administrators might consider having school professionals think of additional actions the school can take to either get started, continue on the path, or assess effectiveness as a school community. The following original haiku poems (see Table 5) were written to start this “process” of thinking about the SEL integration “process.”



**Table 5.**

*Process haiku poems*

We <b>acquire and use</b> knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It's what's really cool.
<b>Develop</b> healthy <b>identity</b> as a loved individual.
<b>Manage emotions.</b> Helping children succeed in school, workplace, and life.
<b>Achieve</b> personal and collective <b>goals</b> for life and work hard for it.
What is best to do? <b>Show empathy</b> for others. Leads to flourishing.
<b>Maintain</b> supportive <b>relationships</b> with others. A key to success.
Caring <b>decisions</b> through character and virtue do lead to thriving.

### **Conclusions**

Through the creating and presenting of original haiku poems, the authors of this conceptual essay presented synthesized snippets of the key principles of the CASEL framework including an explanation of the framework, broad and interrelated areas of competence, goals, SEL instruction, and the integration process. The importance of training teachers in social emotional learning is high. When considering professional development opportunities for teachers and school personnel, administrators should consider the use of haiku as a pedagogical exercise for converting the tenets of SEL into concise concepts for increased understanding and awareness, thereby creatively prompting interest in pursuing formal training on this valuable topic.

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