Quick Reference Guide:

Social and Emotional Learning in World Language Programs

**Social and emotional learning (SEL)** is defined by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](https://casel.org/) as “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." Although SEL-appropriate instructional approaches can be applied across disciplines, there are specific ways in which world language classrooms are particularly well suited for addressing SEL and supporting students’ SEL skill development.

Supporting SEL

**Five Core SEL Competencies**

*1. Self-awareness, which involves emotions, perceptions, and confidence*

*2. Self-management, which involves motivation, discipline, and control*

*3. Social awareness, which involves empathy, respect, and understanding diverse perspectives*

*4. Relationship skills, which involves communication, engagement, and teamwork*

*5. Responsible decision-making, which involves reflection, problem-solving, and evaluating consequences*

To effectively support students’ social and emotional learning, educators must work on developing their own SEL competence. Safe, welcoming, and supportive learning environments are essential for effective SEL instruction, and teachers’ own SEL skills directly contribute to classroom culture. Educators can develop a positive climate by using student-centered teaching methods, encouraging cooperative learning, and modeling appropriate behavior and language that makes students feel comfortable and secure. Well-managed classrooms that promote participation and engagement are particularly important for SEL, and students should be highly involved in exploring and expressing their own identities throughout their learning experiences through, for example, goal-setting and self-assessment to increase their sense of autonomy and self-efficacy.

Integrating SEL into Instruction

Various components of world language instruction implicitly build SEL skills, as students are able to develop linguistic, cultural, and social and emotional competence through exposure to diverse languages, cultures, and peoples. Explicit teaching of SEL skills can also support language acquisition and lead to student success in the world language classroom. Active, group-based learning activities are particularly helpful for integrating SEL into world language instruction, as games, projects, and discussions provide engaging opportunities for interacting with classroom content and strengthening SEL skills. Standards-based lessons involving identity, social justice, and global issues provide an opportunity for students to develop and reflect on their skills in decision-making and self/social awareness. Students can participate in communicative, performance-based tasks that promote world language development while simultaneously supporting self-regulation, conflict management, and teamwork, and educators may also consider using films to explicitly introduce students to various ways of recognizing and expressing emotions across languages and cultures. Authentic materials in the target language can also address SEL-related topics, encourage self-reflection, and support students’ understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

*Steps for Addressing SEL in World Language Programs*

Addressing Emotional Responses to Language Learning

Students who experience foreign language anxiety feel nervous about performing poorly on assessments, being evaluated by teachers and peers, and communicating, interacting, or presenting in the classroom, and these feelings may ultimately lead to lower levels of achievement or a desire to stop learning the language. It may be helpful to create opportunities for students to reflect on their feelings and work together with peers to solve language learning problems, where negative feelings and beliefs associated with the language are identified, disproved, and repackaged to support a positive mentality about the issue moving forward. Supportive and encouraging instructional practices that develop students’ positive emotions are recommended to further put students at ease during the language learning process, and a strengths-based approach to teaching that highlights what students can do with the language may promote the happiness, optimism, and resilience needed for long-term language learning. Standards- and proficiency-based assessments that focus on what students can do with the language are recommended, and educators are also encouraged to consider students’ emotional responses to assessment and creative approaches to grading to promote self-confidence and a sense of autonomy in world language classrooms.

Recommendations for Social and Emotional Learning

* Proactively work on developing your own social and emotional competence
	+ Attend trainings related to mindfulness, resilience, and stress management
	+ Collaborate with colleagues to create a positive school culture and climate
	+ Develop practices that support your personal and professional wellbeing
* Provide a safe, encouraging, and motivating learning environment for your students
* Recognize, value, and celebrate all students to create a positive learning experience
* Consider individual needs, abilities, and emotional responses to pressure and challenges
* Incorporate supported, collaborative, and individual activities that speak to various SEL skills
* Explore issues that reflect students’ experiences and their personal and academic lives
* Work with students to develop a set of shared norms and rules for participation
* Use age-, developmental-, and proficiency level-appropriate SEL instructional approaches
	+ For elementary levels, introduce therapeutic board games, morning meetings, sharing circles, class webs, and breathing, counting, and mindfulness exercises
	+ For secondary levels, introduce project-based learning, community-based activities, journal writing, and self-reflection involving topics of diversity, identity, and social justice
* Highlight diverse perspectives by exposing students to various language varieties, cultures, and peoples
* Use authentic target language materials that address SEL-related topics and skills
* Teach about emotions in the target language and encourage students to increasingly use the language for thinking, processing, and feeling both in an out of the classroom
* Use self-assessments to help students identify self-perceptions related to language learning
* Provide extended preparation time, scripted dialogues, planned role-plays, and small group activities for students experiencing anxiety related to speaking the language
* Ensure that students have opportunities to feel successful in the classroom
* Advocate for your own SEL needs and the SEL needs of your students and classroom
* Participate in school-wide SEL-related discussions, reflections, and collaborative partnerships

For more research and a full bibliography for this and other QRG topics, see

[World Language Standards Literature Review Report](https://www.doe.mass.edu/worldlanguages/leader-network/literature-review.docx).