

Highlights from NNSTOY SEL Fellowship Weekly Discussion

I haven't even gotten past the first article you shared, Janelle, and I could sit and let it marinate for quite some time...

"At its simplest, design thinking asks educators to understand, improve, and apply solutions to our problems. These disciplines are the ghost in the machine of innovation."

So many points stood out to me, but the quote above was most poignant. I am currently reading *The Innovator's Mindset* by George Couros (he's worth a follow on Twitter), and he poses a similar question: Would I want to be a student in my own classroom?

As we move forward with this week's experimentation and continue to press on with curating/developing SEL materials for other teachers, we need to keep our end-users (students and fellow teachers) in mind: Are we truly meeting THEIR needs and helping to solve THEIR problems?...

Thank you so much for sharing this!

In the first article, I was intrigued by the emphasis on Universal Design. This summer, I have the opportunity to take a Universal Design class and was wondering how UX principles could be applied to secondary education. It seems to me that the public education system we have now in the United States was designed (if it can be said to have been purposefully designed at all) based on what adults think students need to learn rather than based on listening to student voices and observing student abilities and needs. At our school, we have been receiving push back recently from students who object to being told what to do and demanding to be included in the planning process for new programs. And we are listening to them. As much as I make a point of helping students discover and claim their voices in my classroom, I continue learning and improving my practice. In our first webinar, I mentioned that our school has what I consider to be an ineffective weekly assessment of students' SEL skills using a number grade that seems meaningless to them. Megan suggested that I ask the students to grade themselves. At first I sighed, thinking that was yet another skill I would have to make time to teach. But after reflecting on the idea a while longer, I realized that my choice is to either continue spending time on an ineffective and meaningless assessment practice or to take that time and do just that: teach. If all goes as planned, the students would have an active voice in assessing their SEL skills in my classes. Long-term, I would like to redesign secondary school (and I may have that opportunity, because it is an idea our principal is considering). Short-term, however... this week I plan to start teaching students to assess their own SEL skills. I'll let you know how it goes.

From the "Learning by Heart" article, I was really struck by the Web of Structural Supports section. Last week, each grade level sat down to talk about students at risk for retention. We identified key issues, brainstormed solutions, and staff members stepped up to take on the responsibility of checking in with those students daily. It will be difficult and trying, but they need our support!

One student in particular had already begun to draw my attention. He continuously gets written up for being disruptive and disrespectful, but he is very kind and funny - just can't get a handle on impulses. I pulled him out of my classroom one day and had the guidance counselor step into my classroom. We spoke for 20 minutes and he shared with me that he just doesn't feel like he can be successful because he's so far behind. He also shared that he's been asking adults in the building for a trapper binder to keep himself organized, and though they promised to get him one, it was weeks later and still not binder! That night I got him all of the organizational supplies he needed and helped him get organized. As a result, he started to have better days! Now, I check in with him throughout the day, and though it is still a journey and one of the most challenging endeavors I've taken on, this student is on a better path. Now, I'm looking to expand his web of support, and trying to pull his mom into the picture in a more supportive and caring way (she tends to just get angry with him).

In a more embedded practice for all of my students, this week I have also incorporated more choice into my lessons. The first ten minutes of class, the students journal and share out - I used to make the journal learning target-related; however, I gave them a few options and left it open for them to make up their own prompt if they wanted! They were receptive and much happier as a result, and SO WAS I! These stories and opinions are wonderful, and now they know the value of being heard! Next time, I am hoping to bring this value to their attention and teach them to be more respectful of others when they are trying to share their voice with the world.

Unlike · 2 people · March 23, 2017 at 6:01 PM

This week I worked on the strategy of direct teaching and practice. Since I teach elementary school, my students role played what it looked like to be respectful both inside and outside of the classroom. Before breaking the students into groups I modeled what a collaborative group should sound, look, and feel like. My students did really well with this idea. They commented they enjoyed working together and liked the freedom to use their creativity. My challenge comes into play when discussing teacher/student directed instruction. I am still working on the gradual release concept of allowing my students choice of topic/presentation format/and group members. In addition, to improve this lesson I would like to add a technology component by allowing students to use movie maker. This will enhance their skills my adding in multi-media components.

Unlike · 2 people · March 20, 2017 at 11:45 PM

The discussion standards mentioned in the "Social Emotional Learning and Academics" article struck a chord with me. A class designed to incentivize discussion preparation (reading and review of discussion questions) can teach students responsibility. I have quite a few students with bad procrastination habits, so I have added scientific discourse to my classes. Students who prepare for case study or current event discussion by reading an article or two can do well in class by verbally participating in the discussion. Those who are not prepared have to complete a longer written assignment. I've been challenged to bring participation up to 100%, but I think that including 10 minute partner warm-up discussions is lowering student anxiety.

I was immediately struck by Shana's words about innovation: "We can't order, threaten, or guilt people to innovate. However, we can be systematic in creating the conditions and systems for innovation to happen regularly inside the walls of our schools." When we look at a new tool as a one time deal, and we are done with it, students don't even have time to master something or gain an understanding before its on to something new. Like JoLynne, I echo a strong focus on Universal Design. The strategies that can help one student, whether SEL or academic, can help all students. This week I focused on Choice. While my room is a drop in support, I still feel like choice is important. Often when students arrive, they are frustrated with the work they are bringing to me. I decided this week to allow students five minutes of choice time to chat about outside school things, either before they began working, or at the end of the hour. Many times my room serves as a makeshift social worker's office, and I wanted to embed a listening ear. It worked well with some students, when they were given the five minute timer, but it was a struggle for my students who get get on tangents and have difficulty ending conversations. Going forward, it may be beneficial for students who still want to connect or discuss information to have cards that they can write additional questions or topics they would like to discuss at a later time, so they feel like the conversation isn't fully ended, but we can get back to the work at hand. Another challenge was timing as students come to my room at varying times during the hour.

 Janelle Dickerson (New York)

Lisa thank you for sharing, I too focus on embedding SEL into instruction through planning and student choice. I agree at first it can be intimidating releasing the reins but when you start to see the processes that the students go through and the products that they create, it is so worth it.

So challenges that I have come across is the management portion. When there are multiple assignments happening simultaneously, How do you ensure that all students are on task?; How so you provide timely feedback to everyone?; Do you use a generic rubric or specialized rubric for each assignment?

Lisa do you let your students plan their own choices or do you provide them with menu of options? I currently provide a menu of options based on the interests and skills of my students but I am now challenging myself to incorporate them within the actual planning process so that the choice options are design by them and not myself.

And... "Too often, however, schools teach social and emotional skills outside the daily curriculum. Consider how much more relevant such skills would be if we embedded them in daily work..." If we want to avoid "another thing on my already full plate" and other similar comments from overworked, tired, and run down educators, we have to give them a way to tie it into what they are already doing.

Which strategy did you select? Planning & Choice

What worked well? Giving students some choices in the tasks they complete has always been part of my instructional practice. My thinking on this being that they will have more engagement in a task they choose than one they're forced to complete. This will ensure a greater level of retention and understanding. It of course, takes more time in the planning process to come up with multiple options, but in the end is worth it for the students, and I find assessing the final products less monotonous. Through our math program, we also explore the SMP (Standards of Mathematical Practice) which embed SEL into our math instruction. Productive struggle/perseverance, reasoning/justifying, critiquing, etc. are all part of our daily math block and give the students realistic/real world practice in SEL skills.

What was challenging? It is always a challenge to avoid being a "Helicopter Teacher" flying in to rescue them at the first sign of struggle, making choices for them, hovering over them to do what needs to be done and straighten things out when they start to go astray. However, allowing these choices and struggles, helps them to spread their own wings and practice their SEL skills in a safe environment. So, as challenging as it might be, we need to learn to let go of some of our control.

How would you revise this strategy to better suit your needs and/or the needs of your students? It's not so much a revision as it is a practice and perfect. It's not easy to move into the facilitator role and allow the children to take some control of their own learning, but it's absolutely necessary from both academic and social perspectives!

Unlike · 2 people · Edited March 19, 2017 at 4:40 PM

Our discussion topic for this week focuses on Embedded SEL Instruction, Part 1: Classroom Settings. This week's discussion will involve some risk taking on our parts to try new strategies within our classroom. This will provide us with valuable insights as we collaborate to build SEL protocols to share with others. If you do not teach in a traditional classroom setting, please feel free to try out a new strategy that best fits your individual setting.

The article, What if we're designing for disengagement?, is a great launching pad for us to reflect on how we design our classroom environment to address the needs of our students.

http://www.shannapeoples.com/?p=1418&utm_content=buffer066d&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

The following resources include specific strategies that may be used to embed SEL into daily instruction and within our classroom setting

- Social Emotional Learning and Academics by Mike Anderson

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct15/vol73/num02/Social-Emotional_Learning_and_Academics@_Bette_r_Together.aspx

- Learning by Heart: The Power of Social- Emotional Learning in Secondary Schools by Barbara Cervone, Ed.D., and Kathleen Cushman

<http://www.howyouthlearn.org/pdf/WKCD%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

Based on the readings, select one embedded SEL strategy that you would like to test out this week within your classroom. After you reflect on how the strategy went, please share the following information with our discussion group:

- Which strategy did you select?
- What worked well?
- What was challenging?
- How would you revise this strategy to better suit your needs and/or the needs of your students?

Janelle- I appreciate you asking us to apply a new strategy to whichever current situation we may find ourselves in. When introducing myself at the beginning of our fellowship, I shared that I am not currently working in a classroom setting. After being diagnosed with cancer during my pregnancy with my daughter, I had to make the difficult decision to stay at home for the time being. I share this private information, because I had to learn the hard way that I am not in control. For the past year of my life, I have had very little control of the occurrences in my life - but I have come to see it as a blessing. As a result, I have been trying to let my 10 month old daughter, Maggie, lead the way. I don't presume to know what she wants, I sit back and watch what interests her, and I find joy in discovering the world through her eyes. If we are playing and she becomes fascinated with a speck of dirt on the floor, I try to not immediately take it from her hands - but rather, sit back and watch her as she learns through touch, feel, smell, and sight (sometimes even taste- YIKES!) Each day I implement the strategy of "observing what works and doesn't work."

Magda Gerber was an early childhood educator who said, "Do less, observe more, enjoy most." I have been trying to emulate this on a daily basis with Maggie. These words stuck with me the first time I read them, much in the same way that Shanna's words did (Lisa and Janice, I couldn't agree more!) - "...we can begin to affect their experiences... by surveying students, observing what works and doesn't work, and inviting them to co-create learning spaces." Perhaps, if we are able to follow these wise words, we will all find that joy in teaching which we once fell in love with.

The challenge, in being a teacher or a SAHM, is creating a safe and somewhat structured environment in which children are able to explore, create, and learn.

(Also: I loved, loved, LOVED, the explicit example of teaching SEL skills through book groups. I could easily see myself shifting the way I have done book groups in the past - and gaining even more positive classroom management skills through the process.)

March 20, 2017 at 8:40 PM

Topic:
Embedded SEL
Instruction