THE HEART OF THE ARTS ARTICLE SERIES

How Do We Operationalize Artistic-SEL?
Utilizing the STAY Framework for Embedded, Intentional and Sustained Social and Emotional Learning

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It is well-established that the areas of "self", "others" and "decisions" are key elements of social and emotional learning (SEL) for student exploration and practice (HotA, Edgar, May 2021). Self includes **identity**, **culture**, **personal beliefs and experiences**; Others includes **connections**, **community**, **empathy**, **belonging** and **collaboration** and Decisions includes **agency**, **goals**, **power**, **voice**, **choices** and **action**.

But how do we create an environment to practice these skills?

We also know that when students create, connect, or respond in any artistic discipline educators can bring SEL competencies to the forefront, if done with intention. For example, we often see collaboration in a chorus, music or theatre classroom, and we may see identity exploration as students create portraits of themselves in a visual arts class, and we have seen that all the arts require responsible decision-making as students choose to try, work and persevere. These SEL skills can

be brought to light as skills students can identify, practice and then aim at their own goals for the short time that they grace our classrooms and especially, after they leave.

So how do we make identifying, recognizing and using these skills an intentional aspect of instructional practice and student/teacher reflection?

We also must guarantee that students experience environments for practicing SEL that are true to life and contextually linked to the relationships, gifts and challenges they actually have. Our work must embed SEL as both learning targets and tools they can intentionally practice using to pursue artistic development that feeds enduring understandings that are sustained reflective journeys for students and teachers as collaborators (Rizzuto, HotA, June 2021).

But how do we nurture and maintain a learning environment where SEL is embedded and sustained?

Finally, we also know that preparing students to be the stewards of their own futures, and ours, requires empowerment. Students will not become the architects of their own plans and goals until they attain agency, self-direction, internal motivation and power. The foundations of those characteristics are feeling seen, heard and valued. This means embracing who they are, the communities they come from, their experiences, and creating space for the elements that make them unique, complex and special to always be present and nurtured like a plant you water dailey. We must select, connect and translate SEL competencies into student life experiences, interests, values, personal goals, language and meanings they understand (Lashley, HotA October 2021). Put simply, teaching must be culturally relevant, "using student culture in order to maintain it…"(Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.19)

So how do we apply this important intersection of culture and SEL as well as address the previous questions?

When I became the Director of Arts at UW–Madison's Office of Professional Learning (PLACE) in the School of Education in 2018 I had just earned a PhD as a developmental psychologist and my research focused on student outcomes in Drum Power, the program I founded in 2001 to use West African, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban drumming to teach life skills (SEL). I had also been supporting teachers leading professional development sessions around building and maintaining healthy classroom culture, as well as facilitating musical learning and social and emotional skill development and practice in Drum Power Classrooms in New York City, to Denver Colorado and Madison, Wisconsin. After many years of professional learning work and reflection on the cognitive developmental outcomes, theories and analysis of student-derived data around the cycles of learning in my classrooms I conceived the **STAY** framework. It calls for teachers to initiate and guide conversations that center students' experiences and learning goals to build classrooms where students and teachers journey together in a reflection-driven process to **Select** SEL competencies, **Translate** them into shared commitments and common language, and make them clear, lived behaviors and **Actions** that support **Youth empowerment** for more thoughtful critical students able to seize agency in their lives.

The framework, which I developed into an asynchronous course where participants create personal implementation plans, walks teachers through SEL as learning to **STAY** in a reflection-driven process--where for S we...

Select SEL skills/competencies (like goal setting, self-awareness or leadership) — by asking What do you and your students/children need to learn and practice? And then for T We...

Translate those skills/competencies into language, routines, plans and community commitments that students understand. And then for A we...take

Action — Good Social emotional learning must come to life as student and teacher behaviors/actions that live in everything we do in class--And finally for Y we support...

Youth Empowerment — Good SEL is driven by students to empower them to think critically, and experience the benefits of SEL as a tool for accomplishing the goals they set for themselves, not focused on controlling student behavior.

STAY Framework

Educators STAY in a reflective process to ensure that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) goals drive toward youth empowerment.

S
SELECT
Select SEL skills and competencies

T
TRANSLATE
Translate skills and competencies into language, routines, plans, and community commitments

A
ACTION
SEL comes to life through student and teacher actions

Y
YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
SEL empowers students to drive learning and shape their lives

So this framework allows us to:

- Set priorities for the environment we want to help create/provide

- Develop systems we would use

- Communicate with students very intentionally and based on Pillars/core values and shared definitions of them through clear action beyond value statements

- Teach toward Youth empowerment in service of student vitality and critical thinking

- Integrate SEL and arts integration thinking and behaviors/actions toward student support growth so that students build goals for their own learning.
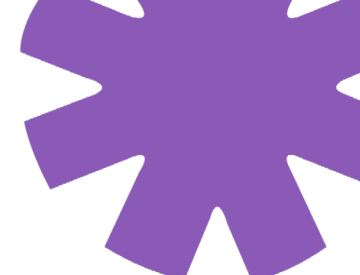

Case Study:
Drum Power

Let's consider how the process of selecting, translating, moving to action and serving youth empowerment looked and evolved for Drum Power as an exemplar for fellow art educators in similar or different disciplines. This is not meant to be a template, however the processes leading to the adoption of the pillars and their function as core values and intentional, embedded, sustained SEL skill development/practice through the arts is intended to be an example that ideally supports educators as they build their own learning spaces.

Drum Power
Pillars of Power

DISCIPLINE

Using my energy for good things

COMMUNITY

Supporting my own learning and the learning of others

LEADERSHIP

Doing the right thing even when I have to do so by myself & especially when noone is watching

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There are 3 main SEL pillars that live in all the work and every activity guiding how we care for one another in our shared learning space(s): **Discipline**, **Community** and **Leadership**. Each came to be through discussions with students exploring their experiences to define meanings and this process takes place at the start of every learning engagement with a new group of students. Students are asked, "what does discipline mean to you, what does community mean for you and what does leadership mean to you?"

When I started I initially had a list of approximately 20 youth development outcomes including goal setting, experiencing the importance of practice/repetition, self-determination, math skills, hard but fun work, ensemble work and on and on..., but I always asked students how they wanted to feel and be treated in class and what they thought was necessary to create a sense of community to support our work, while also giving them ownership over the space, and making it culturally relevant–shaped by their goals and values. After

many years I settled on the SEL pillars of discipline, community and leadership as the intentional foundations of our gatherings (Parker, 2018). However, the evolution of each pillar has been unique to my experiences with students and unique to the way we work in Drum Power--thus, yours too will likely be unique to what and how you teach.

Discipline, our first pillar, is a conscious reclamation of the term away from negative connotations — I always ask students what discipline means to them and someone always says "when I get in trouble" and back in the day they'd say "when I get a whoopin'." We, however, connect it to the old school idea of arts disciplines as a practice in service of skill development and perseverance over time with regular work, growth and positive energy — in the way that music, dance and visual arts were cultivated disciplines. And we apply scholar Michael Yang's (2009) interpretation of Paulo Freire: where discipline is a necessary condition for effective action in the social world. Freire wrote that "True discipline does not exist in the muteness of those who have been silenced but in the stirrings of those who have been challenged, in the doubt of those who have been prodded, and in the hopes of those who have been awakened" (Freire, 1998, p. 86).

However, our action-focused, applied definition came from a young drummer who shared that his karate Sensei told him discipline was "**using your energy for good things**." Thus, *discipline* is a pillar that includes several competencies: responsible decision making, self-management and self awareness (CASEL, 2013) as well as personal goal setting, self-assessment and monitoring self-progress that are unique to Drum Power.

Community, our second pillar, is the translation of social awareness and relationship skills which centers what students bring with them from their communities and homes and then positively reinforces it. Students always know what communities are and do. They know what they contribute to their communities as well as what they receive in return. They know, from experience, the ways those dynamics play out as empathy, self-sacrifice and reliance on others. The actionable definition we use in our classroom context is "**supporting my own learning and the learning of others**."

Discipline and *community* alone are sufficient to create rich spaces to practice SEL and learn academic skills in powerfully supportive ways that build skills for use more immediately and into the future. However, in order to provide a space to build and support student agency through critical thinking and self-confidence, I translated those concepts into **leadership** — "**doing the right thing especially when no one is watching and even if I have to do so by myself**." This was also a response to models of extrinsic motivation whereby students are offered praise or prizes as rewards rather than being allowed to embrace and practice wanting to be their best selves through internal motivation with positive reinforcement. Leadership is a concept that lives in learning, sports, communities, churches, schools, and most careers.

The selection of *discipline*, *community* and *leadership* was also an explicit choice to use language that is familiar to students when they are young that will still be present when they grow into adults. Moving from selecting SEL competencies to translating them as a community is an Iterative process toward empowerment that starts with finding shared experience-based meanings and defining shared commitments that tie all the life skills to our work and actions as individuals (teachers, administrators & students) and as connected community members. Then, tying them to the goals students have for themselves elevates the work to student empowerment. We challenge students to be the architects of their own plans to address the following questions:

1. Who do you want to be? *What kind of person do you want to be for yourself and for those you care about?*

2. What are you doing to get there? *What are you doing now and more importantly, what are you going to do from this day forward?*

So how did I get there? I worked backwards considering what lived in the content I was teaching as implicit SEL and considered what skills we would need to practice just to be in a healthy learning space together. However, rather than stop there I moved from translating those pieces together with students into actions to facilitate youth empowerment. The following STAY SEL classroom planning worksheet illustrates and summarizes the key steps:

STAY Classroom SEL Plan

STAY Elements	My Plans
Select SEL Skills/Competencies: 1. What life skills do you need students to use/ practice in your class? 2. What skills does the content you teach require? 3. What skills are needed for a healthy learning community?	
Translate those skills/ competencies into pillars: 1. What might your pillars be? 2. Share one strategy you will use to define or explain their meaning to/with students?	
Action—Good Social emotional learning comes to life as student and teacher behaviors/actions 1. Create an action for each pillar from above.	
Youth Empowerment—Good SEL is driven by students to empower them 1. Share 1 routine for students to regularly explore their own thoughts and interests for group discussion? 2. Present one arts activity that will allow students to incorporate their cultural identities to individual OR group art making	

What does applying the STAY framework allow students to do?
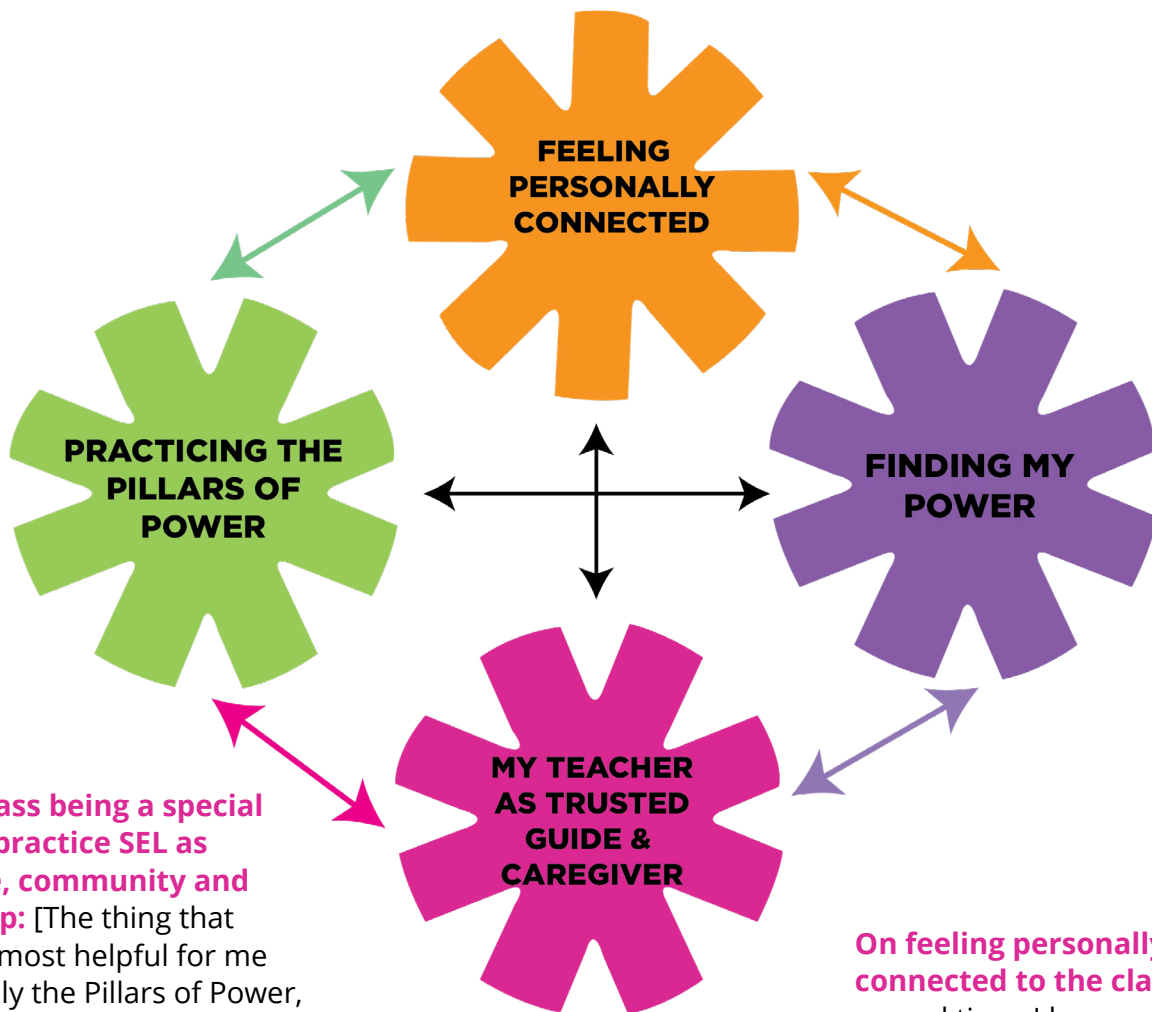
First, it is important to measure success by centering student voices. This model of SEL integration engages students to feel empowered in the class context because they can see and feel how it benefits them even beyond the current arts class. Success is defined by self-efficacy--what students are able to do and what they believe they can do (Bandura, 1986). The following initial questions can guide early thinking around outcomes and assessment:

• Are students feeling powerful and using that power for good in ways that they are expressing in obvious and subtle ways?

• Are students helping one another, kind to one another, empathetic toward one another?

• Are students expressing their own ideas and running the class?

In 2015 interviews of Drum Power students ranging from students in their first year of drumming to those in their 7th year revealed the following themes, outcomes and student observations (Lashley, 2018)

Students expressed the following in interviews:

• **On feeling personally connected to the class:** I have a good time. I learn new things and just be in my own little world...my own little world is music and stuff... (Second year drummer, 5th grader)

FEELING PERSONALLY CONNECTED

PRACTICING THE PILLARS OF POWER

FINDING MY POWER

MY TEACHER AS TRUSTED GUIDE & CAREGIVER

On the class being a special space to practice SEL as discipline, community and leadership: [The thing that would be most helpful for me is] probably the Pillars of Power, which are discipline, community and leadership, which probably saved my life during all the stuff happening [with me] at school. Sometimes I get mad a bit but then I feel like the discipline, leadership and community like, really helps me. Before I joined I didn't feel like I had those powers and those strengths. So when I joined I felt like Mr. Lashley was a very optimistic person who could help me with my life. (3rd year drummer, 7th grader)

The most important thing I think I've learned from drumming is the sense of community and kind of how everyone is better as one. Everybody sounds better together and we are all stronger in a bundle than just like as stick. That's how I kinda' see it. We build each other up and help each other with that. (2nd year drummer, 4th grader)

On the teacher as a trusted guide and caregiver: When I first joined [the School A drum class] I felt pretty nervous. It was a new thing and there were a lot of people in there and Mr. Lashley has an interesting teaching style. He's a great teacher but very different than more traditional teachers. He's very focused on discipline and he pushes people. He doesn't let people stay down. He constantly pushes for them to be able to go farther and he makes them think that they can go farther. He tells people that they can, and he helps them do that. (6 year drummer, 10th grader)

On feeling personally connected to the class: I have a good time. I learn new things and just be in my own little world...my own little world is music and stuff... (Second year drummer, 5th grader)

On finding my power: I learned that I should not doubt myself...The most important thing I learned is probably that you should not give up and [to] keep trying. If you are doing drumming and you get something wrong and you just say 'Oh I can't do that' then you're never gonna learn it... This girl Samia does the breaks [leads the drummers playing instructions with her drum], and she's really good at it but sometimes she messes up but she keeps trying and she doesn't just say 'Oh I can't do this' but she keeps going. And I learn from [watching] her that I should do that. (1st year drummer, 5th grader)

Mission Statement

The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning (ArtsEdSEL) is dedicated to illuminating the intersection between arts education and social emotional learning to facilitate the embedded, intentional, and sustained application of SEL-informed arts education.

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