

SEL and Culture in Music Education

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Context & Purpose

"SEL is 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."

(CASEL.org) Because culture is interlinked with how people process and respond to emotions, the culture of students should be considered when implementing SEL practices in the classroom.

This purpose of this study is to analyze SEL practices of current and former educators that have worked with specified populations to derive implications for better implementing culturally responsive SEL practices in the future.

Methodology

In July 2021, interviews were conducted via Zoom with 8 teaching professionals, all of whom were either teachers of classrooms with at least 50% of students being from Asian, Native American, Hispanic, or African American communities or self-identified members of one of the previously listed communities. (See Table 1). These professionals were reached through postings on Facebook and similar social media sites. The interview questions were selected by the author to discover positives, negatives, and overall input about their experience regarding culture and social and emotional learning. The first section of questions was asked to all interviewees, and the second set of questions was chosen based on their answer to a qualifying question in the first set. Interviews were sufficiently transcribed by zoom and were read several times by both members of the research team to identify themes.

Findings

- Creating a classroom environment where students feel safe and respected allow for open discussions about culture and SEL programming. This is especially important for educators who are teaching students outside of their self-identified culture.
- Learning about students' culture(s) provides an opportunity for educators to examine their implicit biases and to implement culturally responsive practices.
- Teaching students of different cultures can create an emotional communication barrier. Recognizing these challenges and the reasons they arise allow for the overcoming of these barriers.

Implications

- When teaching students, never assume anything about their culture. It is better to ask and get it right the first time.
- Meet the students where they are. Students have external stressors that educators often do not see but will impact their ability to learn.
- Embracing diversity in the classroom is a gateway for a positive learning experience for all students.

Table 1: Interviewees

Interviewee	Member of Specified Culture(s)?	Teacher of Specified Culture(s)?	Which culture(s)?
Jane*	Yes	No	Asian (Japanese-American)
Joelle	No	Yes	Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern
Donna*	No	Yes	Hispanic, Native American
Tammy*	Yes	No	African American
Evelyn*	No	Yes	African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American
Ray	No	Yes	African American
Daniel*	No	Yes	Native American
Amy*	No	Yes	Hispanic

*Denotes use of a pseudonym

References: CASEL. (2021). Retrieved September 13, 2021, from <https://casel.org/>

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