



SEAL, or Social-Emotional Artistic Learning is the practice of utilizing arts integration strategies to teach social-emotional learning competencies.

What are Relationship Skills?

While Social-Awareness allows us to understand the diverse groups of people around us, Relationship Skills helps us to build meaningful and lasting connections with others.

According to CASEL.org, relationship skills refer to: *The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.*

These abilities include communication, social engagement, relationship-building, teamwork.

~SEL Competencies cited from CASEL.org

SEAL and Relationship Skills

When creating art together, performing art together or enjoying art together, you are building relationships with one another. It's something that you just can't avoid. Art is so personal and universal at the same time, that it touches you personally and connects you with others in the same moment. Pretty deep, huh? Well it is.

Some people dismiss the power of art. Maybe they don't give themselves the chance to reflect on it. Maybe they don't think it's worth their time. Maybe it scares them a little bit. Regardless, we as teachers have the unique opportunity, with all new learning, to expose students to new ideas and give them time to explore. No matter your own experiences with the arts, you can certainly make the time for students to explore these ideas.

Let's again look at the *creative process*. The creative process includes every part of art making from idea conception to drafting to refining and performing. Throughout this process an artist may ask:

- Who influences my choice-making?
- How do others create or compose?
- How can we use the arts to communicate with others?
- How can I critique others' art?
- How can I use others' critiques about my art?
- What is this artist's perspective?
- How can I show my perspective?



Visual Art & Relationship Skills

I have a painting hanging in my office of something I created years ago with a friend, Erin years ago. It was an impromptu piece we made outside when we both were tired of working on whatever it was we were doing in an art class. In it, I can see my style and hers swirling freely together. I remember smiling and laughing as we made it, staying to our own spaces, yet intersecting every so often to make it a unified piece. It's a wonderful memory!

So is the case whenever you create something with another person. Of course, there may be some conflict in your creation: someone has another idea for the sequence of the cartoon, or the color that should fill a space or the direction in which the object should face, but that is part of the process of creation - AND building relationships.



Working on relationship skills is not just about the smiles and laughs, but what you do when someone doesn't agree: communicate, listen and seek help when needed.

Of course, you don't have to create a piece of art together to build a relationship, though. Sharing your art with another person is just as much a part of relationship skills.

When I was part of an integrated arts cohort for my master's degree, the experiences we shared through our art-making was amazing. We ended up with a very cohesive group. As we looked at our own visual art and tried to make sense of it, we were encouraged to share as well. We learned so much about each other in this way. It was deeper things than where we lived and how many kids we did or didn't have yet. Instead it was about pieces of our personalities, our quirks and the stories and experiences that made us who we were at that point in time.

We also practiced some amazing skills:

- We listened intently to the others in the group because we understood what they were sharing was real, thoughtful and sometimes raw.
- We communicated ideas that mattered.
- We asked questions of each other that allowed the artists in us to dig deeper into the work.
- We critiqued each other in a meaningful way to help each other portray the emotion or perspective that was intended.
- We discussed our art work in a caring way.
- We allowed ourselves and encouraged each other to laugh at mistakes and take risks.

And ultimately,

- We created a safe environment for ourselves.



Sound familiar? These are all part of relationship skills!

Doing this in your classroom could be challenging at first, but it could also be very beneficial. The key is first to create a safe and caring environment in your class. You can only do that by role modeling what that means. You yourself have built relationships with your students by listening, communicating clearly, helping them to resolve conflicts in a nontoxic manner and promote teamwork.



To get your students, no matter what age, to start practicing these skills, you can try a “Create and Share.” This is a simple activity where students create a piece of art and then share a bit about it. You guide the sharing by asking guiding questions that allow students to tell a bit about their thinking as they created such as, “Why did you choose that color?” or “What does this part of the image represent?” Guide students into seeing how others communicate their ideas through visual art and help them to ask questions or say meaningful, age-appropriate comments about others’ work.

You can find a more detailed lesson plan for this and other SEAL activities at teachSEAL.com

Music & Relationship Skills

My two favorite ways to build relationships through music is with active listening experiences and percussion circles.

Active listening is how I came into arts integration to begin with. I literally wrote the book on it! My book, [Inspired by Listening](#) describes in incredible detail how to bring active listening experiences into any classroom. Music teachers love it because listening to music is a great way to learn everything from theory to history. Other teachers love it because it provides a unified way to integrate music into literacy, math and social studies. But regardless of what you might be teaching alongside the listening, you are building your students’ relationships with one another.

What I have found over the almost 20 years I’ve been actively listening to music in my classroom, is the sense of caring and community it naturally cultivates. When you listen to and discuss music, all kinds of things get brought up: story lines, characters, emotions, instrument personalities, and many other things that provoke interest and conversation. The students practice listening skills and communication while reinforcing musicality. What’s more is that they are sharing a common experience and that alone helps to promote a sense of community in the classroom.

My other favorite way to build relationship skills with music is through a drum circle. Actually, in my classroom (or other location in my school where we can make a bit of noise), we create more of a percussion circle using all types of shakers, strikers and scrapers. I make sure



my collection, or that which may be borrowed from a music teacher, has a variety of loud and soft percussion instruments that will cater to all students' levels of comfort with playing. (I even have a couple of toy maracas and egg shakers in there for those who are very shy.) The important part of a drumming circle is that everyone in the circles has a voice!



Once instruments are decided on, and it's time to play, the leader will start off with an ostinato, or repeated rhythm that is played throughout the experience, acting like a backbone to the music. Then, as students feel comfortable, they come in with their own instruments and layer their sounds on top of the ostinato.

Drumming circles do many good things in terms of SEAL: build self-awareness as you find your voice in your instrument, practice self-management as you learn how to play an instrument appropriately to convey your emotions and develop social awareness as you

look around and see how others play and interact with one another. The most lasting of all, though is how drumming circles build relationship skills. In a drumming circle, you must listen and contribute appropriately to the whole. You must understand when to play and when to be silent. You must use your other social-emotional skills as a springboard to contribute to the group.

Drumming circles promote teamwork and collaboration in a very personal way that only naturally has a lasting effect on the participants. Not to mention, it is uplifting. Whenever I hold professional development retreats, we always have a drumming circle. Whether with students or colleagues, I encourage drummers to listen and interact with one another through their instruments.

Steve Ferrarus over at RootDrummingSystems.com knows the power of drum circles! In fact, his team has created amazing programs that help teens and addicts work through tough times in their life and become part of a community. Their focus is on increasing social competence, problem solving skills, optimism and connecting and communicating with others through drumming. This is real SEAL work!



Drama & Relationship Skills

What better way to practice relationship skills than with drama!! Drama has been used for decades for students to work on everything from how to start a conversation to conflict resolution. You may even do this with your students already.

The beauty of utilizing drama concepts within a SEAL lesson is that you are allowing students to explore other perspectives in a safe environment. In other words, a normally kind and shy child could practice how to assert her voice in a strong and positive way. A tough kid could put himself in a situation where he practices how to compromise.

I enjoy using SEAL situation cards with my students. These cards, which are available to download in the SEAL Tools section of teachSEAL.com, have various situations where students practice how to react in a certain circumstance while keeping in mind important theater concepts such as creating character and setting, the use of movement and improvisational dialogue.

Conversation Starter...

You're new to a school and it's lunch time. You find a place to sit, but you don't know anyone at the table. You finally catch the eye of another person sitting near you.

Social-Emotional Artistic Learning

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Situation Card

Dance & Relationship Skills

When I think of dance and relationship skills I can't help but think of people dancing at a special event like a wedding. Those who choose to get down and boogie connect with each other in a way different way than while sitting around the dinner table.



I can't help but remember the last wedding I went to for one of my nieces. As with many family gatherings, it was great to connect with family members that I haven't seen in a long time, but the most fun I had was dancing with my daughter and my cousin's family, especially their three young boys.

We barely said 3 words to each other the whole wedding, but we created a great bond through our moves and expressions of joy. We mirrored each other, we played off each other, jumped in sync together and even dramatically slow danced together. They didn't want to stop. Neither did I. Again, I remember this fondly and bet my cousin, when trying to help them remember who I am for the next event, will say, "She's

your crazy aunt who danced with you at Julie's wedding." (And I'm okay with that!)

If your students are open to dance and movement, do it! If not, get them there with baby steps. (These steps were laid out in the article on SEAL and Social-Awareness.) But don't think you have to have Arthur Murray come in and give dancing lessons for this to happen. Allowing students to experiment with dance is just as good.



A simple way to get students moving with one another is through mirroring. This may be a familiar activity with you, but now, let's make it a true SEAL activity that works on relationship skills! In mirroring, students are asked to stand face to face. One person is the leader and the other will mirror whatever the leader does. If the right arm goes up, the mirroring person puts up their left arm and so forth. With mirroring, the two people are communicating with movement. One is "talking" and the other needs to "listen" intently and copy. Be careful, with the right class, this activity can lead to laughing and fun! (And with others, you may need to pause some frustration and talk them through conflicts - all part of relationship skills.)

As with any SEAL activity, you will need to embed the social-emotional learning that is going on; taking the time to reflect on students' emotions, what is an appropriate way to act in these situations and, in this case, how moving with another person is building relationship skills.

And for those who are dance instructors or have a class willing to dance untethered, go for it! This is your opportunity to bring in the SEAL aspect of what you are already doing. When you dance, you communicate with your body: the slightest push means for you to turn, when you sway, you invite the other along. The best dancers are those who can read another's body language and react appropriately with their own.

Conclusion

Social-Emotional Artistic Learning (SEAL) provides for many collaborative and meaningful experiences. It is no wonder why art making allows for lasting relationships. You are creating something that truly comes from within yourself, sharing it with others, listening to their ideas and putting it all together in a pleasing way for all involved.

