

Social Emotional Learning

Emotional Regulation and Cultivating Perseverance

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DINÉ Institute for Navajo Nation Educators

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Arthur Note:

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Nóóselibini bidzildóó (Empower the minds of young learners)

Introduction

My name is Laura Delmar, I am originally from Navajo Mountain, Arizona (Naa'dzis'aan). A small, isolated community on the east side of the mountain. I am of the ashi'hii (salt) clan, born for the tó'di'chi'níí (bitterwater) clan. I am a mother, maternal and paternal grandmother, a sister, and an aunt. My first language is Navajo (DINÉ), and English is my second language. I currently live in Kayenta, Arizona (Tó'di'néesh'zhee). It is a small community with a population of at least 5000 people. Monument Valley, Utah is at least 21 miles to the north. I work at the Kayenta Unified School District, a state public school. I work as an itinerant early childhood special education teacher. I am also the teacher team leader and chairperson for the student appraisal team (SAT chair).

I invested my career into early childhood education by teaching preschool children 3-5 years of age. I was a young mother looking for a job one day when I noticed a flyer on a public bulletin. The flyer was an announcement of an on-the-job training program. I was given some options at the orientation and being teacher aide sounded very interesting, so I applied. The three months of training that specialized in early learning for young children was enough to start a lifelong career. I was hired permanently with the Head Start Program as a teacher assistant. I was in that position for at least two years when I enrolled at a local community college and received an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education. I continued with Head Start and became the head teacher. My desire to maintain a high-quality service to young children allowed me to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. I then earned a Master of Early Childhood Education with an emphasis in special education.

Context and Rationale

This past year, I was placed in the kindergarten grade level as a special education teacher. This extra responsibility came without warning when the assigned kindergarten special education teacher left her duty area without plans to return. I was given five kindergarten students, all boys ranging from 6 to 7 years in age. They each have an IEP with goals to work toward within a certain amount of time and service provided individually. They are in least restrictive environments, which are regular education classrooms where they follow the same curriculum as their non-disabled peers. It was a new experience for me, and it took me a little longer to adapt to the kindergarten curriculum. I suppose it was the daily individualized learning approach that made me realize that this grade level was highly challenged by expressing emotions. These emotions are revealed through behaviors. It seemed very tough for these young kids to identify how they feel and relate to others, peers, and adults. To make that more challenging, they lack the skills to self-regulate. It delays their learning time while at school.

For an example, a kindergarten child enters the school building in the morning and is abruptly directed to the cafeteria. He repeatedly attempts to talk to the entrance duty person and seems he is being ignored. He attempts to look at her several more times, the other children were beginning to go around him, and to no avail he begins to walk slowly. As he was getting back

in line, another adult startles him and he reacts to that sudden directive, by pulling out of the line. He finds a spot in the corner of the hallway and sits down in that corner in a protesting position and ignores the commands made by his peers and adults. He continues to protest even after all the students have gone to class. He finally decides to go to his classroom after an hour and a half. He has already missed that amount of learning time.

I had a chance to see him later that day and there is an explanation as to why he was in protesting mode. I noticed he had articulation errors in his speech, and it was very hard to understand him as I attempted to ask him what got him upset earlier that day. I repeated what I thought he was saying to him, and he nodded in agreement. He shared that he was trying to tell the lady at the entrance that he already had breakfast at home and ask if he could go straight to class, but instead he was directed to the cafeteria.

I observe every child as they arrive at school each day. It is in my demeanor to greet each one with an individual interaction that allows them to feel accepted and welcomed. Those little interactions can tell a lot about a child. There is a quote that comes to mind, "Children need models rather than critics," by Joseph Joubert. Teachers, and all who provide supervision at entrances of school buildings, should be more cognizant of the well-being of each child. They should be more welcoming of young children by being friendly and excited, as well as more patient in allowing more time to get to a child's level for a positive connection. This ensures each child is reached through a verbal good morning smile that lasts throughout the day.

I am developing a unit that references emotional regulation and cultivating perseverance in an early childhood learning environment, specifically in the kindergarten grade level. To develop an environment that enables a child to manage their own emotions independently. To use words that help them to communicate for self-advocacy. To maintain and direct their own behaviors as they mature despite the unpredictability of their daily lives. I am using my experiences (trainings) and education in the ECE-SE as my baseline in this development. I am referencing personal experiences from my childhood to validate the information I am providing. I understand each child is different and they each learn certain skills as they grow developmentally in their own unique ways. It may take a child longer than others to grasp certain life skills. A child may already have most skills as they enter school. These important life skills are teachable, on any given day.

I have observed that most young children are hands-on (kinesthetic) learners. They learn through daily interactions from peers as models. Their speech and language development evidently increases. I would like to ensure that each environment provide learning opportunities for each child. For each environment to include explorative learning where a young child is given a chance to learn independently. To interact with their peers and make positive choices that increase their social emotional development skills. Where each child can follow a routine with less challenges. Where a child can assist another peer successfully.

The typical age for a child to be eligible for kindergarten is 5 years-old and must be at that age by September 1st in the state of Arizona. The public school where I work follows the Arizona state's age rule. For preschool, the state's rule is that a child can be 3 years of age by September 1 before determining enrollment eligibility. The public school has K-12 grade

levels within the district. There is another school in the community, a BIA funded school that serves kindergarten to eighth grade.

I was about six years of age, a child whose only travel away from home was to a play area a few yards from the house. A place where the stress of being a child disappeared by pretend playing the big people that I am aware of as a child. I would make houses out of sticks by using empty cans to make roads and people out of more sticks, some standing and others sitting. The hours I spent outside seemed endless, as the sun sets, I would hear my mom's voice, "Are you hungry at all, come inside now." I would go inside and join my siblings, who are already eating. My little sister always saved that last piece of bread for me. My little sister, no more than two years younger than me, were best friends, and then the other sisters were much older than us, and the rest were brothers. I was taken to a boarding school about 20 miles from home. When we arrived at the boarding school, I followed my mom into a building not knowing I would be left there. I looked around observing like any child would. I noticed strange people and others my size in the building. A sudden feeling of anxiety filled my tiny chest, and it became very overwhelming. Within that moment of the intense emotional state, the need to be rescued by my mom became apparent. I turned towards her, but she was not there to rescue me, to hold me, and to tell me that I will be okay. It took me a long time to build trust again as a young child. I had peers and adults within my reach at the time to help me work through the separation anxiety I believe was developed at that time. It took reassurance from adults to make me believe that my stay was temporary and that my mother would return to take me home. If an environment is set-up in a way where it nurtures young children, it has the magic to allow a child to self-regulate from an intense emotional stress.

I grew up alongside thirteen siblings, ten who were older and two who were younger. My parents were very loving and did their very best to be caring and nurturing with equity. I did not witness any loving one more than the other as we were equal in their eyes. My home environment was a learning environment where my parents facilitated our learning. My home environment provided opportunities to build positive relationships, with support from my older siblings. However, we each had our own share of disagreements. We had livestock (sheep) which was and still is our livelihood. We each shared the responsibility by taking them out of the corral to graze on nearby fields. I would go out at least five miles after the flock of sheep and sit under a tree as they grazed nearby. I would pick out sticks and pebbles to count or break tree branches to see what is inside, just to occupy my time. There's serenity in being outdoors, especially when you are out herding sheep.

Content Objectives

- ❖ To identify own emotions through (reading, writing, and verbalizing).
- ❖ To successfully regulate own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- ❖ To maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with peers and adults.

This unit is meant to focus on social emotional learning (SEL). What is social and emotional learning SEL? "The popular press has highlighted a wide variety of skills such as grit, empathy, growth mindset, social skills, and more." At its core, SEL involves children's ability

to learn about and manage their own emotions and interactions in ways that benefit themselves and others, and that help children and youth succeed in schooling, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship. To effectively manage emotions and social interactions requires a complex interplay of cognitive skills, such as attention and the ability to solve problems; beliefs about the self, such as perceptions of competence and autonomy; and social awareness, including empathy for others and the ability to resolve conflicts (S.M. Jones and E.J. Doolittle, 2017).

We want to create learning environments where each child can express their emotions appropriately. We want each child to make meaningful relationships with their peers and adults. To understand their own and others' emotions through experiences with peers and adults. To maintain those skills and use throughout their lives. For teachers and others in each learning environment to teach with compassion. As a young learner, given that individual attention with words spoken softly in my language was very effective. However, if there is a disconnection, it becomes very challenging, learning gets disrupted and may be lost. As a teacher, I make sure I greet each child by name and clan. I will say, "Yáh'tééh' abi'ni shi'déézhii yá'zhi," (Good morning my little sister). By speaking my language (DINÉ), students make me feel I am an important person in their lives. "We all need happy, supportive people in our quality worlds, nothing less will do," William Glasser, M.D. (2017). A teacher who teaches with compassion is one who is patient, friendly, and always calm. A teacher who teaches with compassion is one who never raise their voice, one who is not critical, and one who will not favor one over the other. We want each student to come to our learning environments (school), wanting to be here, smiling, and feeling welcomed throughout the day. We want each student's social emotional well-being to change if it was negatively disrupted coming in from the home setting. We want teachers to be present and readily available to make that change. We want teachers and those in the learning environments to be more attentive to the needs of each student even by taking that extra time to listen or to bend down to a child's level and tie the shoestring of a rushed morning.

Learning styles and teaching methods...

Learning to speak English as my second language at 6 years of age was very challenging. The only language I could speak and understand was DINÉ. I had an awareness of print and heard the English language prior to entering school. However, it took me a little longer to fully grasp the phonological awareness and follow the process. My teacher at the time noticed that I learned better through visual tools and hands-on materials. Perhaps, that came from looking and tearing out bright and colorful pictures in catalogs and magazines that my uncle and brother brought home for me. I would sit there for hours looking through the pages filled with children's toys and clothing.

When students are not performing as well as they could be, it is likely they just need to be taught in a different way. It is important to remember diversity is not exclusively about qualities, beliefs, and faith. It can also determine how we best learn new skills. Some people learn through movements and hands-on activities, while some need visual information to fully understand a concept. A successful teacher is the one who does not only disseminate

knowledge and encourage learning but can also identify the learning styles of students and tend to each one of them (Inspire Education, 2013).

According to Inspire Education (2013), the idea of individualized learning styles started in the 1970s and since then has greatly influenced education. Fleming's learning styles are categorized into visual, auditory, reading-writing, and kinesthetic. I am specifying the visual (spatial) and hands-on (kinesthetic) learning styles, because they were the learning styles that I had a better grasp on during childhood. As teachers, we want learners to comprehend and use the tools we teach, but we need to be cognizant of which learning style works best for each learner. Pedagogy is teaching and learning in the classroom, according to PowerSchool (2021). Teaching pedagogy, or in other words, teaching methods, can either be teacher or student centered and can have a low or high-tech approach. Teacher-centered learning focuses on the teacher giving lectures and sharing content through direct instruction. In this case, the focus is on the teacher's knowledge and conveying that to students. As a result, teacher-centered assessments are meant for students to show how well they remember that knowledge at the end of a unit, PowerSchool (2021).

My parents had the authoritarian parenting style with my older siblings but changed to authoritative with the younger siblings. Their intentions with following a daily routine from being woken up by my father in the early morning hours until the sun sets were positively beneficial, I suppose. He would say, to stay in good health, you must get your heart pumping, and we ran towards the east, down a hill, and back up. To ensure your heart is pumping blood throughout your body, you must eat breakfast, as we all sat together to eat breakfast. It seemed they followed the day by movement of the sun as we were busy with chores throughout the day. When the moon light hit the top of our hogan at night, he would bring up stories about his childhood, how he followed certain stars that led him home. I can say that without doubt, my parents followed the framework of the DINÉ Education Philosophy (long before it was written) to promote and support my physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. It has given me the perseverance of maintaining my well-being as a child into adulthood.

The delivery of this unit will be guided by the concept of the four cardinal direction framework as this process of teaching is in sync with the Diné Education philosophy. The teaching and learning method is a process that is meticulously thought out and planned. As a teacher, you would do as many observations on each student as you can. Who are they? What are they like? What is their past learning like? Who was their last teacher? Who are their parents? What is their home life like? What are they at with their current knowledge? How will you help them make connections with new knowledge and build on prior knowledge?

Although the philosophy has certain elements that make up the whole concept of teaching and learning. I am making references only to the following list of four areas. As listed below, the first one is, *nitsáhákees (thinking)*, which is the process of using your mind to figure out certain strategies. In my prior statement, I indicated that as a teacher, you are gathering information about your students. You are observing and thinking about the varied ways each of your students behave in a different environment other than their home or other environments they are most comfortable. You are observing for ways to ensure they grasp the

teaching you are providing. My behavior, as a learner, changed in a school setting where I felt I needed to be more serious as a student, which was not very comfortable. As a teacher, you are thinking of ways to connect with young learners so they can grasp the concepts you are teaching. The second listed is, *nahat'á (planning)* which is the process of organizing what has been meticulously discussed and chosen, supported by data. The third one listed is, *iiná (living)*. And the last one listed is, *sihasin (assuring)*.

- Nitsáhákees (Thinking)
- Nahat'á (Planning)
- Iná (Living)
- Sihasin (Assuring)

Teaching Strategies

Individualized Instruction

The initial step of this unit is to set a baseline for a personalized education learning method. A student may be observed having a challenging time more than once, after interventions have been implemented and are deemed unsuccessful. An individualized instruction, one-to-one teaching will occur so that the skill building continues in a progression towards a desired goal. The general focus is on that student, by responding to their unique needs. It also ensures a student to create their own talent based on their interests. The learning environment is set to meet their needs in a supportive way.

Modeling

Modeling is an act of repeating another person's behavior. For an example, in young children, a caregiver may show the child how to wash his hands by going to the sink directly. The caregiver may show the steps of washing hands, turn the water on, wet hands, get soap and lather on hands. The next steps would be to rinse hands and get paper towel to dry off hands. This type of modeling would show the child how to wash his own hands independently. Some may need more practice to accomplish the whole concept of washing hands. There is also another way of modeling for a certain child who may be struggling. Peer models are very beneficial. A child who is struggling can watch his peers closely and daily. He can increase all developmental areas by observing and imitating when interactions are occurring every day.

Large Group Activities

The large group activity concept is when a young child willingly contributes to a large group learning. For an example, a teacher may read a book to the whole group and ask questions relating to the story. A child may answer questions asked by the teacher in which the child's interaction is considered participating in a large group activity. This type of interaction will allow other children to engage and join in every time they are asked to do something. This skill is essential because it shows a child is developing confidence in large group activities.

Small Group Activities

Small group is where a class is divided into smaller groups of young children led by a teacher to work on a specific skill together. For an example, a class may break into smaller groups from a large group and work together to create a project. The smaller group also requires collaboration from all involved just like the large group. Working in small groups gives students a chance to practice the higher-order thinking skills that instructors love to teach. Students who do small group work generally learn more of the material and retain their knowledge longer than students who do not (Davis, 1993). The small group method allows all learners to make mistakes and make discussions to make corrections. It allows them to work together to come up with strategies that will support their success.

Classroom Activities

The Power of Mindfulness

What is mindfulness: Mindfulness is a meditation practice to help calm a person who is experiencing anxiety or other stressful situations. It is a technique used through breathing exercise (gently breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth) while concentrating on the present. It was developed thirty years ago and now been found to be an effective strategy for young children. In the last few years mindfulness has emerged as a way of treating children and adolescents with conditions ranging from ADHD to anxiety, autism spectrum disorders, depression, and stress (Garey, 2022).

Activity: Mindfulness using the five senses (5 minute) Everyone will be seated comfortably. Everyone will visualize the environment and chose five items in the room. Everyone will close their eyes and keep closed and will remember the 3 of the 5 items they saw in the room. Everyone will listen, and name 3 things they hear in the room. Everyone will touch 3 objects where they are seated. Everyone will think about what they can smell, and taste. Now everyone can open their eyes.

Activity: Listening to Your Body and Your Feelings (10 minutes) Give each kiddo a blank butcher paper, big enough for them to complete an outline of themselves. Have them lie down on the floor and on top of the paper. If they have a friend that can help them with this activity, they are welcomed to do. They will each get a marker and trace an outline of themselves, including their feet and arms. When they're done, tell them to use different colored markers to identify certain parts of their bodies (ie., heart, brain, lungs, etc.). Ask them questions like, "When you feel angry, where do you feel it in your body?" "What happens in your body when you feel sad?" If they like, they can hang their images on the wall, or take home to hang on their walls.

Activity: Group Read Aloud (Just Because I Am – A child's book of affirmation) "I am learning and growing every day. I learn by looking. I learn by listening. I learn by doing. Sometimes I make mistakes. That's part of learning, too." (L.M. Payne, 2015). The story in this book carries a message about self-awareness, emotions and feelings in young children. It allows a child to recognize his or her own emotions when feeling sad or happy. It is allowing a child to use words and ask for help if that's what they're experiencing. It is

allowing a child to be a self-advocate and to distinguish between good and bad feelings. So that each child is aware of their environment and to know that they are safe.

Student Assessment Plan

1. Self-regulation & Responsibility

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
+	+	+	+	+

2. Interpersonal Skills

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
+	+	+	+	+

3. Self-Concept

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
+	+	+	+	+

Alignment with Standards

Pre-K-3rd Diné Character Building Standards:

K'é hwiindzin dóó ádá'hozdolzin bee hadinish'tée dooleeligii bohwiideesh'áál.
I will develop and apply critical thinking to establish relationships with the environment

PO 1. K'é shintsékees at'ée dooleel.
I will recognize ways to express relationship.

STANDARD: Approaches to Learning Strand 3: Confidence and Resilience Concept 1:
Confidence and Resilience Goal: AEL.AL.3.1. d2- The child demonstrates self-assurance, motivation, and stamina in a variety of circumstances. Demonstrates a mindset of resilience when approaching challenges.

Resources

Garey, J. (2022, February 3). The power of mindfulness. Child Mind Institute. Retrieved from <https://childmind.org/article/the-power-of-mindfulness/>

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Murphy, P. (2015) Just Because I Am. A child's book of affirmation. Free Spirit Publishing.