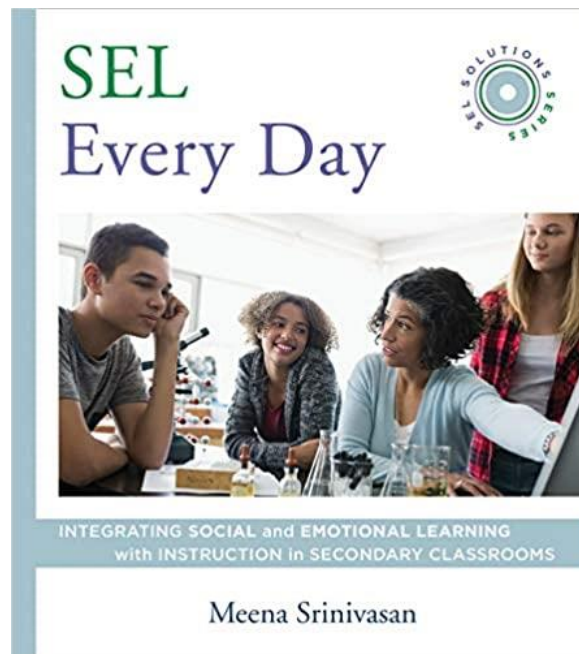


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Review of *SEL Every Day: Integrating Social and Emotional Learning with Instruction in Secondary Classrooms* by Meena Srinivasan

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Overview

As a doctoral student navigating the stresses of being a graduate research assistant, supervising student teachers, and juggling my own full time course work, *SEL Every Day* was the book I didn't know I needed. On top of being an incredible resource about embedding social emotional learning (SEL) into curriculum, this book is also about how teachers and other educational leaders can and should integrate SEL into their own lives. Social emotional learning, according to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is:

[The] process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 10)

SEL is important for student learning and development, but it is also important for an educator's own development. Learning the tenets of SEL can bolster an educator's pedagogy by giving them tools to take care of themselves and their students in the classroom, and these tools can transfer outside of the classroom as well. *SEL Every Day* provides readers explicit instruction on the why and the how of incorporating SEL into secondary classrooms.

Each section of this book begins with a story of an educator's own implementation of SEL and proceeds to provide the practical purposes of

SEL, like helping students grow their sense of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, their relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Additional resources for readers are peppered throughout each section as well for further learning. The author provides readers with clear instructions for weaving SEL into the classroom in the form of lesson plan templates, examples for creating SEL learning objectives, and guidance for students as well as teachers to participate in self-assessment, mindfulness, and reflection. A book with rich resources for educators at any level of familiarity with SEL, *SEL Every Day* discusses the benefits of SEL's incorporation into the secondary classroom and the successes all can find in its implementation, like increased positive behaviors, self-awareness, and academic achievement.

Part One

Part one of *SEL Every Day* focuses on the standards of SEL, the challenges that come with it in secondary classrooms, educational equity SEL helps bring about, promoting SEL as a lifelong practice, and the neurological benefits of streamlining SEL in curriculum for adolescents. As a former high school English teacher, this book has shown me that my entire district could have leveled up from an application of SEL. Its five competencies are the following: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. School teachers, leaders, students, and student guardians alike can all benefit from its implementation because studies show "that when teachers prioritize SEL there is more

effective classroom management, and when teachers grow a personal SEL practice they experience less stress and burnout” (2019, p. 9). However, from my own teaching experience, I understand the objection that some may have in uniting SEL with a schoolwide curriculum. Srinivasan notes these challenges and subverts them.

The challenges that can appear with prioritizing SEL in middle and high school classrooms, Srinivasan states, arise because of common differences with the elementary to secondary classroom transition: teachers have less one on one time with their students, courses often are more content-driven and thus do not allow for additional time for SEL, and the misconception that one’s elementary schools have provided all they need of SEL by the time they begin middle school. Many see SEL as an add-on to learning, but this book proves the point that it should be fully interwoven into curriculum for the wellbeing of teachers, students, and community.

Many secondary teachers and leaders accept the myth that academics and SEL do not belong in one baked together unit, and Srinivasan notes a few reasons why this may be the case. She writes that challenges like teachers having little one-on-one time with students and teaching more content-driven courses leaves little room for anything beyond college and career-readiness in their classes. In discussing this challenge, Srinivasan asks readers to think beyond this misconception of SEL and reflect on their favorite class from adolescence. Likely, she notes, the teacher was able to connect on an emotional level with students, and there were elements of

risk-taking and engagement, “and in order to take risks and stay engaged you had to feel safe, seen, and connected—all of which are attributes of SEL” (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 29). This section sets the tone of the rest of the book and makes clear that it does not provide a copy and paste curriculum for educators to apply to their schools and call it a day. On the contrary, *SEL Every Day* is a call for intentional SEL practice in one’s classroom with explicit guidance, proving with each page that it is an essential read for teachers everywhere.

Part Two

Part Two’s title is “Creating Community: The Relationship-Centered Classroom.” It begins with a high school teacher of English language learners reflecting on how she sets the tone in her classroom each day to “intentionally create conditions for learning” and then incorporates SEL into instruction (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 42). She writes that in incorporating SEL, “Instead of prioritizing how quickly I could get a lesson started, I began to prioritize how I could get my students to learn” (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 41). She greets each student by name as they enter the room to gauge their wellbeing, and she notes that she begins each day with a mindfulness activity to support herself and her students. This teacher has students engage in SEL, which shows that even in classrooms where students do not all speak the same first language, SEL instruction is fundamental to creating a positive, connected, and goal-directed community.

This reflection grounds the rest of this section, which begins with a discussion of mindfulness

and its role in teacher wellness. This discussion leads to applicable tactics that teachers can use to center themselves and destress. High stress in teachers between the years of 1985 and 2012 rose from 35%, an already alarming number, to 51% (Eva & Thayer, 2017). Pun not intended, this section's stress on the importance of teacher wellness is refreshing; the practical and accessible application of this book shows the author's real passion for SEL. Srinivasan pushes for SEL through to and beyond adulthood, because while it is important for students, it is also important for you.

The rest of this chapter remains refreshing with practical applications supported by research driven practices like Restorative Justice (RJ), and community-building circles, which support SEL incorporation. Srinivasan notes, though, that once educators weave SEL activities into their lessons that they cannot think they have now mastered this practice. Teachers must interrogate their practice of SEL in the classroom consistently to revise it with their own and their students' changing needs. As she ends this section, Srinivasan passes the baton to the reader: "When we fly," she notes, "we are reminded (in times of emergency) to always put our oxygen masks on first before assisting our children" (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 79). Before we incorporate SEL into our lessons, it must first make a home within the teachers and leaders so that they can set the table for this positive, revolutionary change.

Part Three

This section reinforces the SEL competencies in the academic sphere, presenting it as essential to learning academic topics in secondary classrooms. After a middle school humanities teacher indicates how they use SEL to promote academic discussion in their classes, this section goes deeper into SEL's connection with cooperative learning, self-assessment and reflection, student voice and choice, and project-based learning. The practitioner voice declares as they discuss SEL's connections with Common Core, "If schools want to ensure that students regardless of circumstance can further their schooling and use the language of power, then teaching students how to express themselves effectively must be prioritized" (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 81). Instead of devaluing SEL and pushing it to the side, this section asks hesitant educators to push themselves to connect the SEL standards to their academic classroom standards. They are likely already embedded.

One of the most meaningful parts of this section is its emphasis on equity; it recommends that using SEL promotes a collaborative classroom where students' learning preferences and futures are valued. Deep into year two of this COVID-19 world, the need for SEL in classrooms is of paramount importance. Students deserve a space where they can trust they are being set up for successful college or career pathways. SEL combines with academic learning standards to help students prepare to apply SEL in their own lives outside of school.

Part Four

At this point in reading, I was all in. I already had an interest in SEL, but along with reading this book for myself, I was also reading this book for my teacher candidates working in a classroom for the first time this year. What essential resources can I provide to these students to help them see the value in infusing SEL into their own pedagogy? These last two sections of *SEL Every Day* are all about those resources I'll share. Part four, "SEL in Lesson-Planning," provides an SEL-integrated lesson plan template as well as learning target examples educators can learn from to transfer to the objectives in their own curriculum. It references an adage from the book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Begin with the end in mind* (Covey, 1989). Before planning, one should ascertain the goals, the evidence necessary to show results of said goals, and what learning activities will bring about the results. Planning with SEL in lessons helps achieve this backwards design.

A humanities teacher/teacher coach reflects at the beginning of this section on how integral students' own inquisitiveness has become in their assessment creation. This teacher discusses how these lessons have become a "living unit," remarking that the connections students create, and their curiosity, informs the teaching practices and their own social awareness, a facet of SEL (2019, p. 121). While this section provides a comprehensive SEL-infused lesson plan, I liked this note from this teacher about their flexible and student-informed plans. It reinforces the point that teachers should reflect on the ways that they instill SEL in their plans and that it will make these decisions and others stronger as a result. As this chapter also notes, teachers make

over 1,500 educational decisions a day (M, 2016). SEL can ease and strengthen those decisions by helping educators become more mindful of their everyday practices.

Part Five

SEL Every Day lastly calls for reflection. It provides resources for self-reflection, group-reflection, and for setting up an inquiry-focus. One important facet to this reflection is working together with colleagues to achieve a shared focus for one's learning community. An unfortunate reality of the busy lives of teachers is that there is not often time to observe or tune in to another's teaching practices, even when they are in the classroom directly next to them. One tool to aid in a collective growth of SEL practices in schools is implementing learning walks, where teachers "visit each other's classrooms and use the coconstructed tool to gather data, facilitating a conversation on what we saw, and identifying next steps" (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 155). This learning walk is a resource featured in this chapter, and it can help teachers work together to find where SEL appears throughout one's teaching and students' learning. Beyond this, Srinivasan provides an outside resource for assessing student growth with SEL and approaching it with Clark McKown's *Assessing Students' Social and Emotional Learning* (2019).

Junior high principal Dr. Paris Priore-Kim reveals at the beginning of this section how the SEL competencies of self-assessment and self-management help them and their team think of how their everyday choices are benefiting their students and their school community. Similar to

how teachers cultivate a positive learning environment with SEL, this principal notes the importance of cultivating a trusted community with one's colleagues. Dr. Priore-Kim says this then "allows colleagues to diverge without discord," nurturing a system where reflection and critique are welcome and expected (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 144). This section concludes with a reminder for one to hone their curiosity and nonjudgement in order to participate in productive reflection with others and the self.

Conclusion

SEL Every Day demystifies the myth of SEL as an add-on to instruction as opposed to being integral to instruction. However, I think another myth people have of SEL is that it is solely applicable to students. On the contrary, educators everywhere should engage with SEL for their own mental wellbeing, for their learning

community, but also for their students. Teachers set the stage in the classroom, and having a clear head with an ability to self-assess, self-manage, be socially aware, grow relationships, and make responsible decisions is important for this stage. Teacher and teaching-infused SEL can be a model for students as they interact with the world inside and outside the classroom as well. This book is fundamental for teachers, school leaders, researchers, and, really, educators in any capacity who want to benefit from the practices of SEL. It is not a magic spell that will fix a curriculum in need of revamping; it asks that teachers learn and practice the areas of SEL for oneself as well as their students. SEL requires much interrogation of the self and one's choices, and though there is real mental work involved in its inclusion into one's life, the benefits that can come about from including it into one's curriculum greatly outweigh the mental work of social emotional learning.

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