

LATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

CAPSTONE PROJECT

Building a Better World

SEE Learning Capstone Project: Building a Better World

The Purpose

The purposes of the SEE Learning Capstone Project are:

- 1 To provide students with an opportunity to integrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired through all the previous learning experiences;
- 2 To collaboratively develop compassionate systems thinking skills by exploring a particular issue of concern;
- 3 To invite students to engage in compassionate action that will have a beneficial impact on themselves, their school, and the wider community.

Primary Core Component



Community & Global Engagement

Overview

The SEE Learning Capstone Project is a culminating action activity for all the students in your class. It is sequenced in eight steps, each of which can be done in one or more sessions. First, students reflect on what it would be like if their entire school were a school of kindness and self-compassion, engaged in the practices of SEE Learning. After imagining and drawing what that would look like, they compare their vision to their own experiences in their school. They then choose a single area to focus on, and create a set of individual and collective actions. After engaging in these actions, they reflect on their experiences and share their knowledge and insights with others. For further information on the principles of the process for the culminating project and the role of the teacher in it, please go to the end of this section.

Implementing the Project

The project consists of eight steps, and will take a minimum of eight sessions to complete.

Providing consistent time for students to work on the project over the course of several weeks supports students in engaging fully in the process, and will provide opportunities for embodied understanding to develop. For a thorough overview, read through all the steps and the notes at the end of this section before beginning with your students.

Step 1: Visioning a kind, compassionate school

Learning objective

Students will create drawings in groups that show what the kindest, most compassionate school might look, sound, and feel like.

- 1 Start with a check-in, selected from the curriculum, to allow students to center themselves and get ready for learning.
- 2 Explain what will be done today.

"Let's think about what we've been learning about kindness, our resilient zones, emotions, and compassion. What would it be like if everyone in this school were learning what we have been learning? What kind of things would they be doing? What would the school be like? Let's imagine that for a minute, with our eyes closed.

Let's imagine walking around the school. What do you see? What are people doing? What kinds of things are they saying?"
- 3 Record students' responses on a piece of chart paper with three headings: See, Hear, Do. Under each, place what students suggest that they imagine they see, what they hear people saying, and what people are doing in this imagined kind and compassionate school. Then ask additional questions and expand the lists:

"How are they feeling in their bodies? What are they doing to stay in their resilient (OK) zones?

How do these people respect each others' differences?

How are children practicing self-compassion or self-kindness? What did you imagine that could look like?

What if something difficult happened? What would they do?"
- 4 Create student groups of 2 or 3 and ask them to draw on large sheets of paper.

"Think about all of these wonderful ideas you've generated, all of the ideas on our chart. [Pause.] Choose one that you'd like to illustrate, one that you think is valuable to share with others so they'll understand more about our vision for a kinder school. [Pause.] Raise your

hand when you have an idea for the one you'd like to illustrate. And then you can choose two partners to collaborate with on your poster. Make sure everyone in your trio is adding their ideas by writing and drawing." [Repeat until all children are grouped and have a specific idea in mind to illustrate.]

Note: If this is one of the first times your students are creating a group illustration, make another chart with group input into what skills a caring partnership will need to practice, so that all of the partners feel proud and satisfied with the creations we'll be making together today.

- 5** Hang the finished drawings on the wall in the classroom or hallway. Ask students to do a "gallery walk." This means they will walk around and look closely at each poster in silence while you play soft music. Ask them to find one thing that they really like seeing and be ready to share why they had appreciation for that.
- 6** Have students take their seats again, or gather in a circle, and share with the class one thing they really valued in the drawings, and why.

Note: If time permits, have everyone share with the whole group. If less time is available, have the students do a "Turn To Your Partner" (TTYP), in which they pair up and share, reminding them that the goal of partner conversations is that our partner feels heard and understood. Close by asking for 2-4 "nominated volunteers"—students who are encouraged by their partner to share the idea they talked about in their partnership, with the whole group. If they are unfamiliar with such paired sharing, remind them of the mindful listening practices and consider modeling TTYP first.

- 7** Explain that next time our class will be thinking together about ways to help the school get closer to these pictures.

Step 2: Comparing the vision to reality

Learning objective

Students will compare their vision of the “kindest school ever” with what actually happens at their school, in order to see strengths and areas for improvement.

1 Start with a check-in to allow the students to center themselves and get ready for learning.

2 Explain what will be done today.

“Because we’ve been learning about how to be kind to ourselves and others, we want to share this with others in the school. So we want to find something that isn’t quite as kind as it could be in our school. Then we’ll try to see if we can do anything to make that better.”

3 Ask students to do a gallery walk again, revisiting their displayed drawings, and paying attention to these questions:

| *“What is already happening at our school that looks like this? What is not happening yet?”*

4 Ask your students to list out some of the ways “this is already happening” and some ways “it’s not happening yet, as fully as we know it can be.” Generate a list to help the group decide on one thing to work on together. (Their ideas may include such ideas as: being more inclusive during lunch time or recess; keeping the school cleaner; making everyone feel like they belong; creating a plan so that everyone has the same ideas about how to show respect for each other; and so on.)

Note: When students identify problems that single out a particular person or incident (like “Thomas pushed me”), reframe to generalize it (e.g., record “Sometimes children push other children.”).

5 Work toward consensus about which area of growth you will all focus on together. You may wish to ask for a volunteer to speak for each item, to say why it is of high value as a point of change, continuing until all items have been spoken to. You might also divide the class into the number of groups that matches the number of suggestions on the list, and give those advocacy groups some time to think together about reasons their assigned item would be a good choice for the class to focus on. This stretches the students to take a positive stand for an idea that was very likely not their own, building perspective-taking and empathy. Differentiate for your

own context, taking an added day for this lesson as best suits your students' current abilities and desire to think deeply about this choice. Relish the benefits of the process, along those of the practical choice they end up making.

- 6 After discussing all of the ideas, use a strategy to gather input to narrow down the focus area choices. Work to build a consensus among the class on one particular item. You might give each student two color-dot stickers and let them choose which item(s) to put their votes on; publicly tally which get the top two amounts of votes; determine if the group can live with starting with one of those two for the "first item we pay attention to together," keeping the others on a Kindness-to-Come "parking lot / waiting list." These can be referenced as short-term areas of attention over the remainder of the year, before recess, lunch or an assembly, for example, or when planning with the group for a substitute teacher's arrival.
- 7 While allowing the students to develop a consensus, keep in mind that the best issues for helping them develop systems thinking will be ones that are of a medium level of complexity (not too difficult yet not too simple; not too big and not too small) and that are relevant to your students (i.e., they care about it).
- 8 When the class has determined one focus area, explain:

"Tomorrow we're going to make an interdependence drawing of the opportunity we chose, thinking about all the people involved, all reasons why this problem might exist, and how these things are connected. [Pause.] Take a moment and think about one thing that we could teach or do for others that would help with the problem we've chosen. [Pause.]

Turn to your closest neighbor to make a partnership or trio and share one of your ideas. Listen carefully to the ideas you hear from others. [Pause for student conversations.] We'll hear just a few of our ideas today, and then talk more about them tomorrow in our next Capstone Lesson. [Pause.] Whose partner(s) had an interesting idea, that you'd like to encourage them to share? Take 2-4 volunteers to prime the pump for tomorrow's conversation. Express your sincere admiration and appreciations for the process and outcomes of the group's work, and let them know you're excited to see what happens in the next step."

Step 3: Exploring the issue through interdependence

Learning objective

Students will explore the many people and things connected to the issue they have chosen through interdependence drawings.

- 1 Start with a check-in to allow everyone to center themselves and get ready for learning.
- 2 Remind the group back into their previous discussion, during which they generated a topic to focus on and brainstormed some possible ideas for ways to address it. You may wish to continue this step for a while today, if that best suits your group.
- 3 Explain what will be done today.
- 4 Create five columns on a chart or the lesson board: Who, What, Where, When, Why.
 - *"Who is involved? Let's draw or list the people involved.*
 - *What are they doing? What is happening?*
 - *When is this happening?*
 - *Where is it happening?*
 - *Why is it happening?"*
- 5 Ask students to get into groups of 4-5. Use your professional judgment to decide whether these should be voluntary groupings or if you've already predetermined groups that reflect a diversity of developmental and academic strengths and needs.
- 6 Explain that each group is going to write or draw the focus issue in the middle of a large piece of paper. Around that they will all draw and/or write about anything or anyone connected with that focus issue, connecting it to the center topic with a line.
 - *"To start, you can choose things from the Who/What/Where/When/Why exercise.*
 - *Who else is involved?"* (For example, if the issue is trash around the school, this would include the people who left the trash there, all the people who have to see it, the people who have to tidy it, and so on. If the issue is bullying, this would include bystanders, teachers, other adults, the family of the bullying child, the family of the bullied child, etc. Note that although bullying is given as an example here, you are encouraged to find an issue that your students can address effectively and concretely.)

- 7 Move around and help the groups of students think through the various aspects of the interdependence drawing, supporting them in increasing their complexity by including more situations and people that are connected.
- 8 When the flow of ideas begins to ebb, get the whole group's attention and explain:

"All the things you've drawn are connected to the main issue in the middle. Now let's think of another level of connections! In what ways are any of the ideas you drew also connected to each other? Talk with your group to see what other connections you see. Then you can draw lines showing those connections." (Model on the class's example chart as you introduce this idea.)
- 9 Have each group share their drawings with the whole class, asking the class:

"What else could we add to our drawing, that is connected?"
- 10 After every group has shared, ask:

"What would it look like, sound like, and/or feel like if this problem were fixed or solved? If it just wasn't a problem here any more? What would that look and sound and feel like?"
[Pause.] Brainstorm a few ideas before letting students know that working toward this very outcome is our next step!

Step 4: How to Make Things Better

Learning objective

Students will explore helpful actions that could be taken to address the issue they identified in the school.

- 1 Start with a check-in to allow the students to center themselves and get ready for learning.
- 2 Remind students about yesterday's collaborative work and refresh the energy and excitement they were feeling as they generated their interdependence webs. Explain what will be done today, that they will think together about helpful actions that could help change (*name their focus issue*).
- 3 Gather again in yesterday's groups and invite students to look at their interdependence drawings.
 - *"When we look at the people in our posters, what are their needs? What are they feeling? What would help them?"*
 - *What can we find in our posters that is something we could help with, as a whole class, that would make things better?*
 - *What can you find in your poster that shows something maybe you could do by yourself that would make things better?"*
- 4 Publicly chart their suggestions in numbered lists under two headings "Individual Helping Actions" for things that a single student could do and "Whole Class Helping Actions" for things they suggest the whole class could do. You could also head the columns: "I Can..." and "We Can..."
- 5 Provide guiding questions to help them generate more ideas as necessary.
 - *("Often when someone drops some trash, there are other people who see it. What could they do? Or later some students might walk by. What could they do?")*
- 6 Explain that next time, you will start taking these actions to help make things better.

Teaching Tips

As an example, the whole class actions for the issue of trash in the school might include things like:

- As a class we could:
 - ① Make posters that say things about the issue (respecting our school; being helpful to one another);
 - ② Talk to adults in the school about how to keep the school clean;
 - ③ Teach children in other classes of the school about the issue;
 - ④ Take turns in class meetings or at circle time, talking about their experiences related to the issue, what it feels like, and what they need from other children and adults.
- Individual student actions could be things like:
 - ① I could tell an adult about it;
 - ② I could speak up to the person who is dropping trash and ask them to stop;
 - ③ I could offer encouragement to others when I see them doing the right thing;
 - ④ I can pick up and properly dispose of any trash I see.

Encourage students to find ways to research and learn more about the problem. For example, if possible:

- Arrange for people who were listed in the Interdependence Webs to visit with your class, so that your students can hear perspectives and ask the guests questions.
- Ask students to come up with questions that they would like to ask their caregivers or parents. Incorporate these in take-home notes about the progress of the Capstone Project. Make returning a response optional; integrate any responses into your ongoing discussions.
- Encourage students to directly observe things in the school related to their focus issue. Help them identify specific areas they can pay attention to and then share in future discussions.

Step 5: Planning Individual Action

Learning objective

Students will choose which helpful actions they would like to take individually that would help with the issue they chose as a class.

- 1 Start with a check-in to allow the students to center themselves and get ready for learning.
- 2 Explain what will be done today.
- 3 Review the previously generated “I Can...” or “Individual Helping Actions.” list. Talk about what might help or get in the way of them actually doing whatever action they choose... (e.g., remembering, being brave, being persistent...) Let them know how you’ll be regularly checking in as a class on progress.
- 4 Give each student a post-it note and ask them to write on it their name and which action they would like to do (or just the number of that item). Ask them to put their post-it note on the board or list next to the item they chose. If you don’t have post-it notes, ask them to write their name on the list next to the item they would like to do. You might choose to prepare an extension to the chart that will hold the post-its / names, that will appear as a bar graph.
- 5 Ask if there is anyone ready to do two of the things on the list. If so, they add their post-it or name to a second idea.
- 6 Gather in group or circle, with full view of the expanded “I Can...” or “Individual Helping Actions” chart. Ask them to notice where other classmates put their names, and to take some private think time to form an appreciation/because statement for an individual or small group. Model an example from each category. (e.g., “I appreciate that xxx said they would focus on inviting people into games because sometimes I am looking for who I can play with.” (Rather than singling out one student for your example, consider using the name of a class pet or an adult who everyone knows and respects, like the principal, nurse, librarian, custodian...) and “I appreciate that six people said that they will take action on saying kind things because that will help all of us feel better as we work and play together.”) Be sure there’s time for each person to share their appreciation/because statement, knowing there’s always the option to pass.
- 7 Remind them of our class commitment to really taking the actions we put our names next to. As their “exit ticket” from the group to the next activity, each student speaks their own chosen action aloud and gets a high five (from the teacher if time for this to happen individually; or from a partner after they exchange their focus area with them).

Step 6: Planning Collective Action

Learning objective

Students will choose which collective helpful actions they would like to take as a class that would help with the issue they chose.

- 1 Start with a check in to allow the students to center themselves and get ready for learning.
- 2 Explain what will be done today.

"Let's think about the helpful actions we've done since we our last discussion. [Pause.] Talk to your partner and tell them one thing you did in the area you chose and how that felt. And if you didn't yet, tell your partner what you think got in the way of doing what you wanted to do. (Provide time for both partners to share.) We'll take one example from each of our focus categories. Who would like to nominate their partner to share about what they did in Category #1? (Read the description of the action from your numbered chart. Repeat for each category.) Thank you to those who shared and those who nominated today! Everyone wish your partner well as they continue to try hard to live out this commitment."

If appropriate in your context, you can expand this learning experience by hearing volunteers from some of the students who haven't yet done something in their chosen area, brainstorming what got in the way of that, and supporting with ideas or encouragement as best suits your group.

- 3 Remind them of the list of "We Can..." or "Whole Class Helping Actions."
- 4 Ask students to decide on three things from the list of "Whole Class Helping Actions" that they would like to do as a class. Take time to discuss before working toward a consensus of three actions.
- 5 Students will get into groups around each of the class actions. Try to have at least two groups of students for each of the three chosen class actions.
- 6 Each group will draw (and/or write) the class action in the middle of a large piece of paper. They will then write all the things they need or that are connected to this action, again in the fashion of an interdependence drawing. (For example, if they decided to make awareness posters for the school, they would draw the poster in the middle, and then around it would be

all the things they would need, such as a large piece of paper, colored markers, a place to hang the posters, permission from teachers to hang the posters up, etc.)

- 7 Ask students to walk around to look at the other group's drawings for the same class action to see if this makes them think of anything they'd like to add to their own drawings.
- 8 When they are done, ask each group to choose one spokesperson who will speak when their group stands to share their drawing with the whole class.
- 9 Based on their posters, students write a list of "action steps" needed for each of the 3 class actions. "So to do that, we need to first do this..."
- 10 Explain that next session, you will all get started on working on those collective actions. But for now, show them the list of individual actions again. Invite them to move their post-it note or leave it where it is, and then to commit to putting that idea into action in a way they can report back on it next session.

Teaching Tips

Consider writing out the issue and the things the whole class can do as statements, such as "To make things better with ____, our class has decided to do ____." Then you can place these statements on the wall to remind the class of what you are all doing.

Step 7: Taking Collective Action

Learning objective

Students will take actions individually and collectively to help the school, reflecting on and improving the process in an ongoing manner.

- 1 Start with a check-in to allow the students to center themselves and get ready for learning.
- 2 Explain what will be done today.
- 3 Remind them of the list of “We Can...” or “Whole Class Helping Actions.”
- 4 Ask them to sit in pairs. Ask:

“What progress did you have in actually doing the helpful actions we talked about last time? If so, share with your partner. If not, tell your partner why you think that is...”
- 5 Debrief the partner share with the whole group, reflecting about what actions they took using a few of the questions below.

- *“Which action did you do and what happened?*
 - *Did anything good happen?*
 - *Did anything unexpected happen?*
 - *How did it feel to do that action?*
 - *Did you learn anything?*
 - *Would anyone like to try a different helping action from the list we made?*
 - *Is there any helping action we should add to the list?”*
- 6 Review the lists of preliminary steps for the collective class action. Decide on what will be done and in which order. See if anything else needs to be added.
- 7 Make a plan on specific ways you’ll get started on the first item in the list, collectively as a class. Make sure every student is involved; identify, or have students identify, something specific they will take on. Many students may be choosing to take the same action, which is fine.
- 8 Over time, repeat this step (Step 7) as students make progress on their collective action, while checking in on individual acts each time, and encouraging them to do additional ones.

Teaching Tips

- You can either take the “Whole Class” actions one by one and complete each one step by step before moving on to the next, or you can tackle multiple whole class actions together, as best suits your group.
- Keep your action plan visibly posted and check in on it regularly as a class.
- Allow for ongoing alteration of the plan if it seems to students that certain actions are working better than others, and/or that other actions need to be added.

Step 8: Evaluating, Reflecting, Celebrating!

Learning objective

Students will reflect on their experiences and share them with others.

- 1 Start with a check-in to allow the students to center themselves and get ready for learning.
- 2 Explain what will be done today.
- 3 After students complete the entire action plan, reflect as a class by asking some of the following questions:
 - *"What do you want to keep doing for the rest of the year?"*
 - *What do you feel most proud of?*
 - *What worked best? How do we know?*
 - *What didn't work that well? How do we know?*
 - *What did you notice about your classmates as we did this project?*
 - *If we could do the project again, is there anything we should change about it, or anything we should do differently?*
 - *What did you learn about creating a kinder classroom/school/community?*
 - *How can we continue to do the things that worked well?*
 - *How can we share what we have done and what we have learned?*
 - *How might we celebrate our work together?"*
- 4 Consider celebrating your students' efforts through sharing the project with others, such as through a presentation to the school or to parents and caregivers.

Principles of the Capstone Project Process

The process, rather than the end goal, is the most important part of the project. This process is designed so that it sequentially builds systems thinking skills, while keeping the focus on kindness and compassion for all involved. Consider documenting the process (as well as the final product) so that you can share it with other teachers, administrators, parents, and guardians. Also consider sharing it with the Emory SEE Learning program, making sure to obtain permissions before you distribute student work beyond the school.

The Capstone Project can also be initiated prior to completing all the SEE Learning chapters. In this case, make minor adjustments as necessary, such as removing questions that use terms that would be unfamiliar to them.

SEE Learning always strives to maintain a strengths-based perspective (rather than a deficit-based one) that acknowledges an existing foundation for constructive change. As your students focus on what can be improved in the school, help them to also remember the ways kindness and compassion are already being shown and received in our school. SEE Learning also emphasizes the agency of students and their ability to make a difference. As stated in the SEE Learning framework, “If students cannot bring about a large-scale change immediately, even the smaller scale changes they can affect are worthwhile, because small scale changes can grow into larger changes, and cumulative larger changes can be created through collective smaller actions.”










Role of the Educator

The role of the educator throughout this process remains that of facilitator. Your students will need to be guided through this process, and provided with support in carrying out their planned actions. This guidance should not involve giving them answers or telling them what to do, but rather involve prompts that direct them back to their own inquiry as well as to previous knowledge and skills they have already explored in SEE Learning. While this gentle guidance can take more time, it allows students to learn from their own mistakes or missteps, and from each other.

Throughout the project, you can prompt them at appropriate times to remember previous activities and practices they have done in SEE Learning (e.g., “Remember when we did the interdependence drawings? How is this like that?”). Encourage them to make space for those students who seem quieter or less engaged, so that everyone is involved and no one is left out. Feel free to supplement the steps given above with additional activities taken from the curriculum, such as mindful listening exercises and reflective practices.

SEE Learning provides educators with a comprehensive framework for the cultivation of social, emotional, and ethical competencies. It also provides an age-specific curriculum for K–12 schools, as well as a support structure for educator preparation, facilitator certification, and on-going professional development. SEE Learning builds upon the best practices in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs and expands on them by drawing in new developments in educational practice and scientific research, including attention training, the cultivation of compassion for self and others, resilience skills based on trauma-informed care, systems thinking, and ethical discernment.

THE SEE LEARNING FRAMEWORK

		DIMENSIONS		
		AWARENESS	COMPASSION	ENGAGEMENT
DOMAINS	PERSONAL	 Attention & Self-Awareness	 Self-Compassion	 Self-Regulation
	SOCIAL	 Interpersonal Awareness	 Compassion for Others	 Relationship Skills
	SYSTEMS	 Appreciating Interdependence	 Recognizing Common Humanity	 Community & Global Engagement



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