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Infusing Thinking and Social–Emotional Learning through Fables

Jessie Ee

Teachers can empower and infuse students' thinking and social emotional learning (SEL) through interesting lessons from fables. Why fables? Fables normally have a moral lesson attached to it and teachers can address these moral issues in a fun, relevant and meaningful way when they relate the fables to children's real-life experiences. As the story unfolds and takes the child to the land of make-believe, the child is in a happy and positive disposition and is able to absorb and learn better as the teacher slowly relates the story to their personal lives through effective questions that relate to the five SEL core competencies like *self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship management and responsible decision-making*.

According to CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2005), the five core competencies can be identified as follows:

Self-awareness:

- recognising strengths, needs and values
- identifying and recognising emotions
- self-efficacy
- accurate self-perception

Social Awareness:

- perspective taking
- empathy
- appreciating diversity
- respect for others

Self-Management:

- impulse control and self-management
- self-motivation and discipline
- goal-setting and organisation skills

Relationship Management:

- communication, social engagement and building relationships
- working cooperatively
- negotiation, refusal and conflict
- seeking and providing help

Responsible Decision-making:

- problem identification and situation analysis

- problem-solving
- evaluation and reflection
- personal, moral and ethical responsibility

In the process of enhancing students' thinking and SEL core competencies, effective questioning is necessary. Questions may initially address the story line. However, it should subsequently proceed to address real life situations. Ideally, all the questions should be open-ended to enhance thinking in children as well as to assess what children learnt from the stories given.







Generating Questions

In generating challenging questions, DeBono's Six Hats can be used to address information, advantages, disadvantages, feelings, creativity and thinking about their thinking (Table 1).

In attempting to address the five core SEL competencies, help children to relate the characters' strengths and weaknesses in the story to themselves. This will help them to develop their own self-awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses e.g. How is the character's strengths and weaknesses related to yours?

As they address their self-perceptions, encourage them also to empathize with others e.g. How will your strengths and weaknesses affect others? At this stage, it would also be wise to help them address their emotions if they are unable to self-manage certain behaviours that are related in the storyline as this would also subsequently have repercussions with their relationships with others. It is hoped that through such questions on SEL, children will gradually tend to consider others' perspectives or the consequences of their actions in making responsible decision-making.

Table 1 DeBono's Six Hats for Generating Questions

	Types	Questions
	Information	What was ... ? Who was? Where? When.....? How many... ?
	Emotions	How did you feel....? How do you think she/he felt?
	Advantages	What are all the good points about ..? What would be fun about being?
	Disadvantages	What was wrong with ...? What might have gone wrong if?
	Creativity	What else could have been done? What if?
	Thinking about Thinking	What part of the story do we need to think about? What did you learn? What are the implications?

In encouraging children to provide reasons for their explanations, it is necessary to get them to elaborate on their answers by asking questions such as:

- “Why do you say so?”
- “Can you elaborate further?”
- “How did you derive at your answer?”

Do ensure that children are given an “appropriate amount of time” to think through the questions asked. Teacher facilitation and probing encourages children to clarify and expand ideas and to build bridges between knowledge and the children themselves as knowledge seekers. Quality interaction includes teacher and children giving reasons and evidence to support comments and opinions, self-critiques of discussions and syntheses, and summaries of points made. Children are actively engaged in the learning process as opposed to sleeping or daydreaming or other forms of non-engagement activities and there is self-regulation or reflection about what is happening, what is learned, and how well the class is moving towards its learning goals. A conducive environment that sees mistakes as part of the learning process, will encourage risk-taking and generating more creative ideas during brainstorming and learning. Teacher’s questions may

further help to scaffold children’s ideas during discussions. This will help children to construct meaning and higher-order thinking that allows for better application of knowledge through critical thinking, problem solving and decision making.

Using fables can truly be an interesting approach in infusing “teachable moments” that warrant thoughtful exploration and investigation of knowledge. This approach can later be extended to include various real-life scenerios e.g. Sarah Boyle in Britain’s Got Talent Video Clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lp0IWv8QZY&feature=related> showing the importance of not judging a book by its cover. The video clip showed the audience’s perception of a lady who auditioned for Britian’s Got Talent and were pleasantly surprised when she started singing. Some of the SEL questions that can be included are listed in Table 4. The teacher can cultivate children’s thinking dispositions in a healthy way through this process.

This constant exercise of such an approach will empower children to consider a range of perspectives whenever they are discussing concepts or ideas whether in class or outside the classroom. This effective learning will slowly encourage

In using the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears from the youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS3nN6PH96Y> and the scene where the dwarfs gave up their bed for Snow White Part 7 in the youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rllx1i1zEfg>, the following questions in Table 2 may be generated:

Table 2 Questions on Goldilocks and The Three Bears and Snow White (Part 7)

Focus	Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Snow White (Part 7)
Information	What was Goldilocks doing? What did her mum warn her not to do? How should we sit on a chair?	Whose house did Snow White stay in? Where did Snow White sleep? Where did the Seven Dwarfs sleep?
Emotion	How do you think Goldilocks feel when she came across the empty house? How did Goldilocks felt when she saw the three bears? How do you think baby bear felt when he found his bowl was empty, his chair was broken and his bed has been slept on? How do you think Father and Mother bear felt when their home was invaded?	How did Snow White feel when the dwarfs offered her their bed? How did the dwarfs feel when they offered their bed to Snow White ? How did the Queen feel when she found out that Snow White is still alive and happy?
Advantages	What are the advantages of finding an empty home?	What are the advantages of staying with the dwarfs? What are the advantages for the Queen when she realised that Snow White is still alive?
Disadvantages	What are the disadvantages of not locking your home? Is it alright to enter someone's home without their permission? Why?	What are the disadvantages of staying with the dwarfs? What are the disadvantages for the Queen when she realised that Snow White is still alive?
Creativity	What if the three bears were found invading Goldilocks' home?	What if Snow White has never met the dwarfs? What if the dwarfs rejected Snow White? What if Snow White is a snobbish and rude princess?
Thinking about Thinking	What can you learn from this story? What would you do if your home was invaded?	What did you learn from the story? What would you do if you are asked to share your notes with your friend who has been absent from class?

the learner to take active charge of his/her learning processes by drawing on their own interests, experiences and prior knowledge and extend their learning beyond the given information. Thus, the learning slowly becomes self-regulated in the learning process and moves on to take an active control of the child's own learning as the child critically and creatively think about the topics that they are learning.

Overtime, according to Zimmerman (1994), self-regulated learners develop

certain critical and creative thinking skills and characteristics that enable them to identify and investigate all sorts of topics in meaningful and fulfilling ways. In the process, children will also be mindful of always taking into consideration others' perspectives and understand how each action has a consequence. As such, they are likely to self-manage themselves better but also their relationships as they become more metacognitively aware of the importance of making responsible decision-making. More lessons on SEL can also be found in Ee (2009).

Table 3 Questions on Social-Emotional Learning based on Goldilocks and the Three Bears and Snow White (Part 7)

SEL	Goldilocks and the Three Bears	Snow White (Part 7)
Self-Awareness	Which animal in the story best describes you? (Goldilocks, Father bear, Mother bear or Baby bear) How are the strengths or weaknesses of the character like you?	Which character in the story best describe you? (Snow White, Dopey, Bashful, Sleepy, Grumpy, Doc, Sneezzy and Happy, Wicked Queen) How is the character's strengths and weaknesses related to yours?
Social Awareness	How will your strengths and weaknesses affect others?	What was the consequence of not sharing something with your sibling or friend?
Self-Management	How would you respond if your friend or your parent entered your bedroom and read your diary? How would you respond if someone hacked your computer to retrieve your personal files?	What is your respond should someone wish to share something precious of yours?
Relationship Management	How would you help your friend or parent to understand that it was wrong of him/her to invade on someone's property without offending the person?	How would you explain to your friend that you can't share your comb or toothbrush without offending them? How would you respond should your friend request to stay with you even though your home has limited space?
Responsible Decision-Making	Your friends urged you to hack your teachers' computer to retrieve the exam paper. What would you do?	Your new classmate approaches you for help but your classmates urge you not to, what would you do?

Table 4 Social-Emotional Learning Questions on Susan Boyle

SEL	Questions
Self-Awareness	How is the singer's strengths and weaknesses related to yours?
Social Awareness	Reflect on an occasion where you were misjudged by your friends, explain the circumstances. What were your friends' reactions and how did you feel? Have you experienced a scenario where you tend to judge someone wrongly? Describe the scenario. How do you think the person felt?
Self-Management	What would you do to ensure that you do not misjudge someone on first impressions?
Relationship Management	What would you do to influence your fellow friends such that they would look beyond the superficial and be more receptive to someone else?
Responsible Decision-Making	If your friends tell you not to befriend this nerdy classmate, how would you handle the situation without offending both parties?


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Christina Cipriano: Social-emotional learning is thinking about the competencies that underscore our ability to be available to learn and available to teach. There are a number of different frameworks that we use. One of the most dominant frameworks in the field is the CASEL five . It's the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Those five competencies are self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. When we think about social-emotional learning, we talk about how social-emotional competencies underscore your *Strengthen your students'™ social-emotional learning by infusing your teaching with these concepts over the course of the school year. Each concept should be taught slowly for one month or longer*™it takes time for students to deeply understand the ideas and begin using them in their lives. We recommend learning about (and teaching) the concepts in order as they build on one another.™ Currently, Social Thinking is not pre-approved to offer participants of eLearning team training access to continuing education credit. However, the purchaser of the module will receive a personalized Certificate of Completion. For some professionals, this documentation may be all they need to earn continuing education credit through their employer or professional organization. The social and emotional learning research-based principles are for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. They include teaching strategies, narrative examples, and further reading on SEL.™ See the updated document here. According to CASEL, social-emotional learning can be defined as: *“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.”*