

## Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Strategies in a Flipped Classroom to Foster Resilience in Historically Black College and University (HBCU) Students

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### Abstract

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Social and emotional learning (SEL) has been found to foster resilience of historically black college and university (HBCU) students. The research draws on studies by Price & Viceisza (2023), Ng et al. (2022), and Mahoney et al. (2020) which demonstrates that SEL skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making can enhance academic performance, improve mental health outcomes, and foster a sense of belonging among HBCU students. Additionally, this paper will define social and emotional learning and what these skills include and their applicability to HBCU students. Similarly, this paper will reflect how social and emotional learning can shape the academic success of HBCU students in all disciplines. Finally, this paper will provide social and emotional learning strategies that HBCUs can apply to foster resilience in students.

**Keywords:** social and emotional learning, historically black college and university, strategies, flipped learning

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### 1. Introduction

The use of social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies to foster resilience in historically black college and university (HBCU) students is a subject matter that has garnered much attention in higher education recently. Similarly, social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools has a long history, evolving from the early interest for social competencies and character education to the elaborated contemporary approaches and comprehensive frameworks that have expanded in recent decades (Cohen, 2006; Osher et al., 2016 as cited in Odak et al., 2023, p. 106). Social and emotional development has been increasingly the focus of both research and policy in education (Cefai et al., 2018 as cited in Odak et al., 2023, p. 106). The last two decades of research in social and emotional learning in schools indicate that social, emotional and cognitive development are connected and related to an array of academic and life outcomes (Jones et al., 2019 as cited in Odak et al., 2023, p. 106). This article will further discuss the relevant conceptual frameworks that explore how social and emotional learning (SEL) impacts the academic success of HBCU students across all disciplines. This research draws on studies by Price & Viceisza (2023), Ng et al. (2022), and Mahoney et al. (2020) demonstrates that SEL skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making can enhance academic performance, improve mental health outcomes, and foster a sense of belonging among HBCU students.

Research into differences in learning ability and learning styles among students has led to changes in how many educators approach teaching. Instructors now understand the importance of considering learning abilities and learning styles when designing their lessons and interacting with students. Studies have also shown that cultural influences in a student's life—often tied to aspects of their background impact how they learn. In urban higher education settings, instructors encounter rosters of students with extremely diverse backgrounds and often struggle with lesson planning that will appeal to how their diverse students learn (Matamoros, 2016, p. 2). Similarly, additional research into learning styles has revealed that cultural backgrounds can also impact how one learns (Auyeung & Sands, 1996; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2007; Omidvar & Tan, 2012, pp. 276–279 as cited in Matamoros, 2016, p. 4). The concept of “culture” can be considered to include “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations” (House et al., 2004, p. 15 as cited in Matamoros, 2016, p. 4).

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Moreover, research has shown that adopting a “one-size-fits-all” teaching style is inherently exclusionary of students whose cultural backgrounds differ from the majority and inhibits efficient and effective learning (Wynd & Bozman, 1996 as cited in Matamoros, 2016, p. 4) because students of different backgrounds engage course materials in different ways (Packard, 2011, p. 146 as cited in Matamoros, 2016, p. 4).

## 2. Relevant Conceptual Frameworks

### 2.1 What is Flipped Learning Pedagogy?

The flipped learning pedagogy has been found to be useful in fostering resilience in HBCU students. A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning, which aims to increase student engagement and learning by having students complete readings and assignments at home and work on live problem-solving during class time. Flipped learning moves from the group learning space (traditional classroom) to the individual learning space and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the professor guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter.

Flip learning has been described in terms of time, space, and activity because it changes how we use time, space and activity in the classroom. Flip learning provides adequate time to explore the course concepts, students ultimately have at least three times as much time to work together collectively, ask questions, air out misconceptions and get any issues resolved (Aji & Khan, 2019; Hobbs, 2022).

Moreover, space is about the physical, emotional, intellectual and psychological context that students use to complete their work. Individual space refers to the context in how the students operate when they work by themselves, for instance in the dorm, library, a coffee house, in a small informal group that meets apart from the formal group, at the tutoring center receiving help on demand, or meeting with a study group. Individual space is work completed based upon the individual's efforts even though others may be present. Group space is how students operate when they are working with a formal group as part of the class itself such as (1) learning with the entire class or some intentional regulated subset of the class, (2) working with a small group formed during class by the instructor, and (3) attending scheduled class meetings, field trips, online class interaction on a discussion board or video chat as part of a scheduled group activity. Flipped learning provides a balance between direct instruction and active learning. Information is taught directly to the student in multiple ways through pre-recorded lectures and the instructor working directly with a group, especially if one group was falling behind to get them on track. The counterpart to direct instruction is active learning, any instructional method that engages students in the learning process. When carefully and skillfully executed flipped learning can help students improve their learning (Hwang et al., 2015; Eppard & Rochdi, 2017). Flipped learning also lays out four pillars of flipped learning and they are as follows:

- 1) Flexible environment - Flipped learning is based on allowing learners to learn in different ways and at different speeds and to give learners a choice in how they demonstrate evidence that they have mastered course content.
- 2) Learning culture - Flipped learning environment is a community that values the learning process in all its forms, the good, bad, and indifferent, with the student at the center rather than the professor.
- 3) Intentional content - Material used in flipped learning are honed to a sharp edge, with explicit connections to learning targets that are clearly stated through what is constructed with high educational quality; and materials are differentiated so that students at different places in their learning can work on something based on their pace and needs.
- 4) Professional educator - The professor must prepare the content and set up the learning environment. They must observe the students as they work and know when to intervene and when to let students struggle. They must collect formative assessment data to know where the “fireworks” go off or “sunk holes” begin as students learn and make appropriate in-the moment adjustments. And be a reflective professor taking time to evaluate their own performance and be willing to share and receive criticism (Rutkiene et al., 2022; Eppard & Rochdi, 2017).

As noted in the book *Flipped Learning: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty* by Robert Talbert (2017), the faculty wanted more time in class to focus on higher-level activities in their subject, particularly those activities that involved the application of basic ideas, critical thinking and problem solving. They also found flipped learning exercises provide skills that students will need after college, such as the ability to self-teach, self-assess, and self-regulate. In other words, flipped learning gives students practice in working as real-life professionals. Flipped classrooms have developed students' abilities to learn for themselves, which increases their confidence. When they

apply for jobs, they can tell employers that they can learn new skills for themselves as they have done during the school year (Talbert, 2017).

Flipped learning reforms the traditional classroom format and allows for more student engagement in the classroom. The creation of expanded time to do active learning in the group space, increase student engagement in the material. Giving students control over the sources from which they learn, and over how they use those sources, is a key element of flipped learning. Additionally, in a flipped classroom the role of the professor and students shifts. Students must take ownership of their learning by practicing self-regulated behaviors on a regular basis. In doing such the pressure for the professor to hold all the information exhibited in the traditional lecture format is relinquished, creating a more productive, professional relationship between the students and the professor (Talbert, 2017; Hwang et al., 2015).

Because students for the most part of their primary and secondary education have been learning in a traditional manner, changing to a flipped learning model can pose a threat to them and the uneasiness with change can manifest in “push back” against flipped learning. They all may sound like complaints but are more expressions of uncertainty about what they are doing, flipped learning tends to bring those issues to the surface, which is ultimately a good thing if we as professors listen and act with the student’s best interest in mind. These verbal expressions can turn into a powerful learning moment for the student not only for that moment in time but through lifelong learning and self-regulated skills they need.

Statements you may hear are the following:

1. “You’re Not Teaching the Class”
2. “I’m Having to Teach Myself the Subject”
3. “I Learn Best When I am Lectured To”
4. “It takes Too Much Time Outside of Class”
5. “I Don’t Have a Way to Ask Questions Before Class”

This is because in this teaching pedagogy students are encountering a paradigm shift in the way their university education is being conducted. No longer are they allowed to be passive bystanders in their education; no longer are they allowed to put aside their work for the class in between the meeting dates; no longer is the course a game to be played (Aji & Khan, 2019).

Some flipped classroom strategies for instructors that can improve the educational outcomes for students include the instructor’s ability to:

1. Stay positive and student-centered.
2. Stress the benefits and final shared goals.
3. Clarify expectations and provide generous support.
4. Communicate early, often, and personally.
5. Listen to students and be open to change.
6. Demonstrate concern of the student’s “whole self” which consists of their mental, emotional, physical, social and spiritual well-being.

## 2.2 What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and emotional learning is also known as social emotional learning or SEL and describes both a type of educational program in a school setting and a developmental process that begins in childhood and progresses through adolescence and adulthood.

- a. Covers a wide range of skills including self-management, conflict resolution, teamwork.
- b. Broadest interpretations include mental health support and services.
- c. When we look at the “Whole Student” – Mind, Body & Soul from the perspective of SEL it accounts for all aspects of a student’s growth: academically, physically, socially, and emotionally.
- d. Which is the “Holistic” approach which for some, may or may not include basic needs such as food and shelter?

## 3. Purpose of Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a vital component of education that equips students with the essential tools to navigate life’s challenges and opportunities. Beyond academic knowledge, SEL fosters self-awareness, empathy, and healthy relationships. By cultivating these skills, students develop a strong sense of self, build resilience, and become effective communicators. Social emotional learning empowers individuals to make informed decisions, manage emotions constructively, and contribute positively to their communities. It is a foundation for lifelong success and well-being (Zins & Elias, 2007; Odak et al., 2023).

Social emotional learning can assist in developing emotional awareness and skills to:

1. Manage emotions and behaviors and express them appropriately.
2. Communicate effectively with others.
3. Develop positive relationships.
4. Feel and express empathy and compassion for others.
5. Make good decisions based on values, impact, and concern for the long-term well being of oneself and others.

Social and emotional learning is the educational process that helps students (1) develop skills to understand and manage their emotions, (2) resolve conflicts, (3) maintain healthy relationships, (4) make responsible decisions, and (5) effectively deal with life challenges. Social emotional learning includes a broad range of mental, behavioral, and self-control skills that people use in social interactions to achieve social goals (Zins & Elias, 2007; Hwang et al., 2015; Odak et al., 2023).

#### **4. Strategies for Improving Social Emotional Learning**

##### **I. Create an environment of belonging:**

Develop positive relationships with students. Demonstrate care, concern, and a belief in their ability to succeed.

1. Allow opportunities for self-reflection and self-evaluation.

Attempt to establish an interactive dialogue in class rather than a one-way lecture.

Incorporate student interests, experiences, and cultural heritage into the curriculum.

2. Give students choice, when possible, to increase motivation and instill a sense of ownership over the learning process (Zins & Elias, 2007).

##### **II. Build a community that includes every voice:**

1. Write the day's agenda on the board.

At the beginning of the semester give each student an opportunity to share a "one-minute autobiography" describing themselves and their life experience. Ask students about their previous experience with your subject and solicit ideas about how they best learn. Engage students in both cognitive and affective inquiry- in addition to asking them what they think about something they are learning; ask how they feel about it (Zins & Elias, 2007).

##### **III. Make spaces to hear your student's story:**

- a) Do a quick class "Check-in" asking students to reflect on their internal state.

b) Check-ins give instructors a sense of how students are doing - sends the message that their emotions matter. – For Example:

1. Raise your hand low to high to show your level of confidence or confusion with this material.
2. Stand and silently dance the way you are feeling at this moment.
3. Name an animal that represents your mood.
4. Report your stress level on a scale of 1 – 10.
5. Describe how you are feeling in one word.
6. Name a song lyric that expresses your current mood (Zins & Elias, 2007).

##### **IV. Celebrate the student:**

Invite successful former students back to your class to talk about the challenges they faced and how they successfully overcame them. Near the end of the semester, ask students to write a letter to students who will take the class in the next semester. Ask them to share how they struggled and grew during the class and what strategies they used to be successful. Have students write down their fears related to exams or other aspects of the class. Once their list is complete, ask them to rip up and recycle their list. (Zins & Elias, 2007).

## 5. Conclusion

Flipped learning, a pedagogical approach where students learn new content outside the classroom and apply their knowledge in the classroom, can be a powerful tool for HBCUs to enhance student engagement, academic success, and social emotional development. When combined with social emotional learning (SEL), which focuses on teaching students to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions, develop positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and learn to handle challenges, flipped learning can create a more holistic and supportive learning environment. The flipped approach allows students to move through the research process more effectively than through a standard lecture, strengthens students' ability to do independent and collaborative work, and involves students sooner in deeper levels of research involving critical thinking (Matamoros, 2016, p. 19).

Social emotional learning (SEL) is a vital component of education that equips students with the essential tools to navigate life's challenges and opportunities. Beyond academic knowledge, SEL fosters self-awareness, empathy, and healthy relationships. By cultivating these skills, students develop a strong sense of self, build resilience, and become effective communicators. SEL empowers individuals to make informed decisions, manage emotions constructively, and contribute positively to their communities. It is a foundation for lifelong success and well-being (Zins & Elias, 2007, Rogers et al., 2022). The adoption of SEL at HBCUs is multifaceted and can address historical disparities faced by Black students by providing them with the tools to cope with adversity, build resilience, and achieve academic success. Support of SEL strategies can foster cultural identity in developing a strong sense of cultural identity and pride in students and empower them to navigate diverse environments and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Social emotional learning can foster a supportive and inclusive community within HBCUs, promoting empathy, understanding, and collaboration among students, faculty, and staff. Lastly, SEL can equip students with the social and emotional skills necessary for success in higher education, the workplace, and beyond, enabling them to build strong relationships, manage stress, and make informed decisions (Van Breda, 2001; Price & Viceisza, 2023; Rogers et al., 2022).

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