

## Introduction to Social Awareness

### Overview

**Social Awareness** is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.<sup>1</sup> Social awareness is a crucial component of appropriate classroom behavior, which contributes to an environment conducive to learning. Social awareness is also widely established as an important factor in workforce success. One recent employer survey conducted by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills demonstrates that four of the five most important skills for high school graduates entering the work force are linked to social awareness: professionalism, collaboration, communication, and social responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

**Why This Matters:** Social awareness may contribute to better behavior and achievement in school and increased engagement with community and school resources:

**Positive Classroom Climate:** Students and educators with strong social awareness can more easily form positive relationships, adapt to their environment, empathize with the perspectives of others, and feel supported. This, in turn, creates an environment where students can focus on learning.<sup>3 4 5</sup>

### **Better Relationships:**

Students who demonstrate strong social awareness are able to engage in constructive communication with their peers and resolve conflicts when they arise. These students benefit from peer learning and know how to take advantage of social supports.<sup>6</sup>



**Fewer Risky Behaviors:** Students who are able to adapt to new environments, understand the needs and perspectives of others, and know where to get support when they need it are less

<sup>1</sup> CASEL.org (<http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies/>)

<sup>2</sup> Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century US Workforce*. Partnership for 21st Century Skills. 1 Massachusetts Avenue NW Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, J. Grant, s., & Morlock, L. (2008). The teacher–student relationship as a developmental context for children with internalizing or externalizing behavior problems. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(1), 3-15.

<sup>4</sup> Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher–child relationships and the trajectory of children’s school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development*, 72(2), 625-638.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, C., & Malmgren, K. (2005). Implementing a teacher–student relationship program in a high-poverty urban school: Effects on social, emotional, and academic adjustment and lessons learned. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43(2), 137-152.

<sup>6</sup> Gehlbach, H., Young, L. V., & Roan, L. K. (2012). Teaching social perspective taking: how educators might learn from the Army. *Educational Psychology*, 32(3), 295-309.

prone to emotional distress and less likely to engage in risk behaviors, such as drug use and aggression, that interfere with school success.<sup>7</sup>

## **Social Awareness: Supplemental Sample Strategies Handout**

**Overview:** Social Awareness can be improved by using a variety of strategies at various grade levels. This guide is a supplement to the social awareness powerpoint presentation. Toolkits are available [here](#).

### **The Jigsaw Classroom: Implementation steps (from slide 22)**

The Jigsaw Classroom activity is a research-based cooperative learning technique for group work. While this strategy applies to all grades, research has shown that it has the strongest effect in elementary grades. This strategy has been shown to reduce racial conflict and increase positive educational outcomes such as improved test performance, reduced absenteeism, and greater liking for school.<sup>8</sup>

Follow ten steps to implement this in your classroom:

1. Divide students into 5-6 person diverse (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, ability) groups. These are called their “jigsaw groups.”
2. Appoint one student as the leader – this person is initially the most mature of the group.
3. Divide the day’s lesson into 5-6 segments. For example, if you want history students to learn about Eleanor Roosevelt, you might divide a short biography of her into stand-alone segments on: (1) Her childhood, (2) Her family life with Franklin and their children, (3) Her life after Franklin contracted polio, (4) Her work in the White House as First Lady, and (5) Her life and work after Franklin's death.
4. Assign each student to learn one segment. Make sure students have direct access only to their own segment.
5. Give students time to read over their segment at least twice and become familiar with it. There is no need for them to memorize it.
6. Form temporary “expert groups” by having one student from each jigsaw group join other students assigned to the same segment. Give students in these expert groups time to discuss the main points of their segment and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group.
7. Bring the students back into their jigsaw groups.
8. Ask each student to present her or his segment to the group. Encourage others in the group to ask questions for clarification.
9. Float from group to group, observing the process.
10. At the end of the session, give a quiz on the material. Students quickly come to realize that these sessions are not just fun and games, but that they really count.

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<sup>7</sup> Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M. J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American psychologist*, 58(6-7), 466.

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.jigsaw.org/>

### **Constructive Controversy: Implementation steps (from slide 23)**

Constructive Controversy is a research-based cooperative learning technique primarily for students of middle and secondary grades. Johnson and Johnson (2007, 2009) created a methodology that enables students' discussions of a complex but unresolved conflict. To facilitate a productive discussion, constructive controversy employs unique strategies that advance students' critical thinking and reasoning skills while seeking to diminish antagonism.<sup>9</sup>

#### **To implement this strategy:**

1. The teacher first asks a complex central theme question (i.e. "Is civil disobedience in a democracy constructive or destructive?"). To learn relevant background information, students examine various primary historical documents related to the central theme question.
2. The teacher assigns each student a position. The students individually research, organize information, and then work with others assigned to the same position to construct a presentation.
3. Students use evidence and logic to express their assigned position to the opposing group. During this time, students in the opposing group carefully listen, seek to understand the other perspective, and ask clarifying questions as needed. The opposing group then presents their perspective as the opponents listen, seek to understand the perspective, and ask clarifying questions. This step enables each group to advance their position while gaining a comprehensive understanding of the opposing position.
4. In the fourth step, students candidly (and collectively) discuss the issue. They advance their perspective, use evidence and logic to comment on the opposing position, and rebut critiques. This step enables students to better comprehend the divisions between the two divergent perspectives.
5. Students then reverse perspectives and present their opponents' position. This step facilitates students' understandings of the evidence and logic of both positions by purposefully forcing them to think beyond their original perspective.
6. Students re-conceptualize the issue by deliberately working beyond their original perspective. In this step, students first identify common ground between the two perspectives and then seek to create a mutually agreed-upon new position.

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<sup>9</sup> Retrieved From: [http://castle.eiu.edu/edjournal/Spring\\_2011/Guiding\\_discussions\\_controversial\\_topics.pdf](http://castle.eiu.edu/edjournal/Spring_2011/Guiding_discussions_controversial_topics.pdf)