
Title	Developing employability skills through SEL competency training
Authors	Agnes Chang Shook Cheong, Jessie Ee Leong Joo and Lee Ngan Hoe
Source	Asia-Pacific Education Research Association Conference 2008, Singapore, 26-28 November 2008

This document may be used for private study or research purpose only. This document or any part of it may not be duplicated and/or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

The Singapore Copyright Act applies to the use of this document.

DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS THROUGH SEL COMPETENCE TRAINING

Agnes Chang Shook Cheong

Jessie Ee Leong Choo

Lee Ngan Hoe

National Institute of Education

Nanyang Technological University

Singapore

Abstract: Based on a research study of multinational companies in some countries, Brown (2003) stated many CEOs are still in a “war for talents” because few people have “employability”- a quality reflecting one’s self-reliance, personal drive and interpersonal skills. According to Kathleen Cotton, there are 3 components in Employability Skills: Basic Skills, Higher Order Thinking Skills and Affective Skills. When interviewed on the expectations of employers for the fourth public university, they expressed unanimously the need to develop soft skills in the graduates of the fourth university. SEL is currently taught to all students at all levels. Through the 5 components of SEL(Self Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Management, Responsible Decision Making) which emphasize on self-efficacy, perspective taking, appreciating diversity, respect for others, organization skills, cooperation, team work, problem solving and ethical responsibility, the communication, higher order thinking and affective skills required on employability can be fostered in students with relevant experiential learning

Developing Employability Skills through SEL Competence Training

Agnes Chang Shook Cheong (agnes.chang@nie.edu.sg)

Jessie Ee (jessie.ee@nie.edu.sg)

Lee Ngan Hoe (nganhoe.lee@nie.edu.sg)

National Institute of Education

Nanyang Technological University

Based on a research study of multinational companies in some countries, Brown stated that many CEOs are still in a “War for Talent” because few people have “employability” – a quality reflecting one’s self-reliance, personal drive and interpersonal skills. (Brown 2003)

Brown, P. (2003). The Opportunity Trap: Education and Employment in a Global Economy. *European Education Research Journal*, 2.(1), 141-179

In the report “What Work Requires of Schools” (Secretary’s Commission, 1991, U.S.A.), the Department of Labour identifies a broad array of both academic and non-academic competencies as necessary for the modern workplace, including:

- Critical thinking
- Decision-making
- Creative problem solving
- Learning how to learn
- Collaboration
- Self-management

NUS 2000 Survey: Employers Rank 8 Important Competencies

1. Teamwork
2. Problem solving
3. Ability to take initiative
4. Desire to learn
5. Interpersonal skills
6. Ability to work independently
7. Oral communication
8. Flexibility in applying knowledge

According to Tony Wagner in an article on “Rigor Redefined” in the *Educational Leadership* (October 2008, 66.(2)), today’s students need to master seven survival skills to thrive in the new world of work. These same skills are the same that will enable them to become productive citizens who can contribute to solving some of the most pressing issues we face in the 21st Century.

The 7 Survival Skills (Tony Wagner)

1. **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**

To compete in the new global economy, companies need their workers to think about how to continuously improve their products, processes, or services. CEOs stressed that the heart of critical thinking and problem solving is the ability to ask the right questions.

2. **Collaboration and Leadership**

Mike Summers, Vice President for Global Talent Management at Dell, said that his greatest concern was young people's lack of general leadership skills and collaborative skills. They lack the ability to influence.

3. Agility and Adaptability

There is a need to think, be flexible, change, and use a variety of tools to solve new problems.

4. Initiative and Entrepreneurialism

One of the greatest problems in the 21st Century in a big company is to avoid RISK AVERSION. The challenge is how to create an entrepreneurial culture in a large organization.

(Mark Chandler, Senior VP and General Counsel at CISCO)

5. Effective Oral and Written Communication

Mike Summers of Dell and other leaders were amazed that young people often have problems in communicating: verbal skills, written skills, presentation skills. They have difficulty being clear and concise; it is hard for them to create focus, energy and passion around the points they want to make.

6. Accessing and Analyzing Information

Employees of the 21st Century have to manage an astronomical amount of information daily. It is not only the sheer quantity of information that represents the challenge, but also how rapidly the information is changing.

7. Curiosity and Imagination

Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*, observes that developing young people's capacities for imagination, creativity and empathy will be increasingly important for maintaining competitive advantage in the future.

What are Employability Skills?

“Employability Skills are attributes of employees, other than technical competence, that make them an asset to the employer.” (Buck and Barnick, 1987)

In this report, the employability skills include reading, basic arithmetic and other basic skills, problem solving, decision making and other higher order thinking skills; dependability, a positive attitude, competitiveness, and other affective skills and traits.

Comparisons of employability attributes listed by the different researchers revealed those that were cited most frequently. These were then organized into three categories of BASIC SKILLS, HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS and AFFECTIVE SKILLS AND TRAITS

(Cotton, <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/8/c015.html>)

BASIC SKILLS

- Oral communication (speaking, listening)
- Reading, especially understanding and following instructions
- Basic arithmetic
- Writing

HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS

- Problem solving
- Learning skills, strategies
- Creative, innovative thinking
- Decision making

AFFECTIVE SKILLS AND TRAITS

- Dependability / responsibility
- Positive attitude towards work
- Conscientiousness, punctuality, efficiency
- Interpersonal skills, cooperation, working as a team member
- Self-confidence, positive self-image
- Adaptability, flexibility
- Enthusiasm, motivation
- Self-discipline, self-management
- APPROPRIATE DRESS GROOMING
- Honesty, integrity
- Ability to work without supervision

At the MOE Work Plan Seminar 2008 on 25 September, the Minister for Education, Dr Ng Eng Han echoed the need for skills to boost employability.

“ Almost all that we spoke to believed that our children must grow up to be confident young people. They must be secure in their own opinions, and communicate well to convince others.

Therefore we must improve oral and communication standards to enable our pupils to articulate their thoughts with confidence. This will equip them to cope better with uncertainty and ambiguity.

Many shared how increasingly learning to work well with others was an essential trait that organizations look out for when recruiting people. In an inter-connected world, and in our multi-racial society, it is necessary for our young to learn to mix well with others, respect differences and build strong and lasting relationships with those around them.”

Is the Ministry of Education taking steps in introducing educational policies or initiatives to prepare our young citizens to handle the future challenges?

Social Emotional Learning is introduced in 2003. The competencies are:

- Self-awareness
- Social-awareness
- Self-management
- Relationship management
- Responsible decision-making

Our Singapore students are doing well in the academic field, but there are consistent complaints that our youths lack EQ and are arrogant. In 2003, MOE introduced Social-Emotional Learning into schools, hoping to improve the current status of our students' lack of social skills.

What is SEL?

Social Emotional Learning refers to the acquisition of skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish maintain positive relationships and handle challenging situations effectively.

(CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2005)).

Social Emotional Learning provides students with basic skills for success not just in school but ultimately in their personal, professional and curic lives.

SEL Competencies include:

- Managing emotions that interfere with learning and concentrations.
- Developing motivation and the ability to persevere even in the face of academic setbacks and challenges.
- Working cooperatively and effectively in the classroom and in peer learning groups.
- Setting and working towards academic goals.

Social and Emotional Competencies

Domains	Example
Self Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Identifying and recognising emotions•Accurate self-perception•Recognising strengths, needs, and values•Self-efficacy
Social Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Perspective taking•Empathy•Appreciating diversity•Respect for others
Self Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Impulse control and stress management•Self-motivation and discipline•Goal setting and organisation skills

Social and Emotional Competencies (continued)

Domains	<i>Examples</i>
Relationship Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Communication, social engagement and building relationships•Working cooperatively•Negotiation, refusal and conflict management•Seeking and providing help
Responsible Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Problem identification and situation analysis•Problem solving•Evaluation and reflection•Personal, moral, and ethical responsibility

SEL Competencies	Employability Skills
<p style="text-align: center;">Self Awareness</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic knowledge 2. Communicative skills 3. Self-efficacy 4. Thinking and problem-solving skills 5. Self-confidence 6. Positive self image 7. Honesty, integrity
<p style="text-align: center;">Social Awareness</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interpersonal skills 2. Cooperation 3. Team spirit 4. Empathy 5. Perspective taking 6. Respect for diversity
<p style="text-align: center;">Self Management</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dependability, responsibility 2. Punctuality, efficacy 3. Enthusiasm, motivation 4. Self-discipline 5. Ability to work without supervision 6. Goal-setting 7. Organization skills 8. Initiative

SEL Competencies	Employability Skills
<p style="text-align: center;">Relationship Management</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooperation 2. Team spirit 3. Providing help 4. Positive attitude 5. Adaptability, flexibility 6. Responsibility 7. Communication skills 8. Interpersonal skills
<p style="text-align: center;">Responsible Decision Making</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problem identification 2. Problem solving 3. Critical thinking 4. Evaluation 5. Reflection 6. Values 7. Responsibility

To complete the SEL process, schools will need to work out rigorous and sophisticated rubrics to effectively assess the extent of the SEL competencies acquired through the lessons or programmes both in and out of schools.

Table 5.5

Activities for Community Partnership

Activities	Rationale
1. Art, music, drama group to collaborate and perform for residents in hospices, old folks' homes or orphanages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Becomes meaningful as students are given the opportunities to contribute to the welfare of the less fortunate. •Encourages cooperation, empathy, and relationship skills among participants.
2. Adopt neighbouring parks or beaches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Raises environmental awareness and social responsibility. •Builds relationship with residents near the parks or beaches.
3. Invite charitable organizations to schools to explore how the schools or individual classes can contribute before organizing charity fairs or collecting gifts in kind without student-beneficial interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Makes giving more significant when children are able to interact with the beneficiaries and understand their needs. •Strengthens communication and social engagement.

Thank You