

# SELinA ep 7

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Heather Woods, Amanda Krause, Sarah Bethune



Heather Woods 00:01

Hello, you're listening to the SEL in Action podcast where we explore what social and emotional learning looks like in different educational and professional settings. I'm your host, Heather Woods. And today on episode seven, we'll be talking about how to implement social emotional competencies in your online courses. And so today I have with me my teaching team from the last year, we have Amanda Krause who is my ta in the social emotional learning Special Topics course. And then we have Sarah Bethune, who is my ta in the social emotional competencies in distance leadership course. So thank you both so much for being here today to talk about how we kind of thought through implementing social emotional competencies in our courses over the last year or so



Sarah Bethune 00:47

thank you for having us.



Amanda Krause 00:49

Yeah. Thank you. Happy to be here.



Heather Woods 00:51

Well, I guess first, I should mention that you two were part of my great teaching team, partly because of your educational background. So Sarah is a second year Master's of education student doing Educational Counseling, our educational psychology, and Amanda Krause is doing her first year of her PhD in clinical psychology, and was a Educational Counseling student at the time that she was working with me. And so their expertise was invaluable throughout the course. And yeah, so I'm really looking forward to chatting today. And so my first kind of question is, you know, what are some of the strategies that you kind of saw us implementing as a teaching team to support our students own social emotional competencies online?



Amanda Krause 01:44

I think for me, when you ask that question, and one of the things that jumps out is healthy relationships, which is a key component of social emotional learning, and competencies. I think, making ourselves as a teaching team accessible to the students, introducing ourselves not just as in this academic way, but as people too was a really important way to build these relationships with them on a human level, rather than just professor and TA and student level. And I think, in doing so, as a teaching team, the students are also more likely and encouraged to do that with their peers as well, building healthy relationships, building respectful and human relationships with their colleagues in the course.



Sarah Bethune 02:37

Yeah. And to add to that, the other thing that I think is really important is that we really tried to create open communication. So one of the things that we did, for example, was, we had a Google Doc, where we commented and asked questions on different assignments. And it's kind of different than the traditional way, you would often see it in courses where the professor just makes a comment on the assignment, it was a lot more collaborative, there was it was opening up room for a conversation, where the students could also, you know, write back to us and it could be more of a back and forth.



Heather Woods 03:17

Yeah, the I think the personalized assessment notebooks really. Like, I know, Amanda, you you've, we use them as well, in the winter. And I think it does open up that kind of private space where there's a back and forth. And it's not just that kind of I think it really just builds on the formative feedback. You know, we're outlining next steps or additional questions to maybe help them think a little bit deeper about things. And yeah, I don't

know, Amanda, did you have any kind of thoughts on on how the assessment notebooks were used, and kind of how they fostered any competencies?



Amanda Krause 03:55

Yeah, I think Sarah hit the nail on the head that it really fostered that open communication, this sharing of different perspectives, the student felt like their opinion mattered, in their own assessment. And I think the key in all of this, is because it's online, those things get lost so quickly. I think in higher education courses, it's just, it's just harder to have those open lines of communication for students to feel heard, and like their individual self matters. Rather than just being a name on a screen, the professor doesn't even get to see a face. And so I think in that way, it was really successful in in providing those open lines of communication, even in an online format.



Heather Woods 04:47

Yeah, and I think particularly right now, like we were doing this long before COVID, we were teaching online, so we were definitely at a bit more of an advantage in terms of when all of that hit it was As you know, Sarah and I were teaching in the spring and kind of had to quickly adapt at the end. But I think because we had those open lines of communication, it really influenced how we were able to manage that shift. I don't know, Sarah, if you can maybe comment on kind of maybe the community that we had built, and kind of how you saw that, during that, you know, stressful pandemic hit. If, if that brings up anything for you?



Amanda Krause 05:29

Yeah, well, one of the things that comes to mind for me, was just trying to be very empathetic of everyone's situation. And the situation that we're all in collectively, at the moment, the way the course was designed, where, you know, people could complete their readings and their assignments within a flexible time period, I think was really important. And I think, you know, having those notebooks, the assessment notebook, for example, was a good way. Like I said, to open the communication, but nothing was ever forced, either. I feel like, you know, it allows the student a chance to reach out if they want to. And we did try to do that on a few occasions to check in with them. But if they didn't want to, that was okay, as well,



Heather Woods 06:19

any kind of other. Like, I know, you both had the opportunity to we had like optional skill, building things, which, obviously really related to the topic of the course, like we were teaching about social emotional competencies, but any thoughts on like, those optional kind of skill, building things and maybe how we integrated those subtly into even our own teaching practice,



Amanda Krause 06:45

I'm trying to think about some of those skill building options that were given to the students. And the one that's coming to mind is the empathy one. Which, I know, like, while they were optional, the students really enjoyed doing them, because it wasn't just specific to this course, and learning the content. But these are things that are applicable to other areas of life. And many of the students that are part of the course, at least the one that we taught, together, were teachers or parents or working in other fields. And so these social emotional competencies are, can be applied across the board, to many different realms. And I think that was really appreciated. And then from a teaching perspective, doing those activities along with them and coming up with those activities, and in trying to implement them in terms of how we communicated with students



Heather Woods 07:48

any thoughts, Sarah?



Amanda Krause 07:50

Um, yeah, I agree with what Amanda saying, I think a lot of the optional activities that we tried to include were things like, we also looked at mindfulness and self compassion and things that people could integrate into their career in their professional lives, or as a student, but also in their everyday lives as well. And especially during a pandemic. I mean, these are skills that I think can be really helpful, professionally, but also, personally. Mm hmm.



Heather Woods 08:25

Yeah, I almost wonder if they'd be applicable to like, you know, different courses, just always having that like, little bit of optional, because we're, like, academics are always thinking of ways that we can kind of foster those social emotional skills at the higher ed level. But whether it's like a little add on,



Sarah Bethune 08:44

that makes me think about the primary, like the public school curriculum right now, just what you're saying here. And that, ideally, we have social emotional competencies integrated throughout all subjects throughout the whole day, from like, kindergarten or whatever, all the way through to high school. And for some reason, higher ed kind of gets forgotten about, we don't think it's important. While they're adults, maybe they can do this on their own. But it just makes me wonder that these things are just as important in your adulthood, as they are as a child, or a youth. And maybe we should be thinking about integrating these social emotional competencies into in higher ed across courses, across faculties, across departments, and that it shouldn't just be designated to a single course that actually teaches on the content of social emotional learning.



Amanda Krause 09:46

I agree. And I also think that, you know, people are busy and they have a lot going on, and sometimes it's difficult to be researching these things or trying to, you know, search to build these competencies in your spare time, I think it's, it's really relevant. And I think it's really handy to have these built in optionally, to a course to where you know that you're getting good resources, and you're not, you know, spending your free time necessarily looking into these things.



Heather Woods 10:16

Mm hmm. Certainly. Yeah. And I mean, it just, I think reinforces that kind of notion that these skills like social emotional skills, whether it's self awareness, or self management, you know, social awareness, are all things that you can build on and work on and develop across your lifetime. Like it doesn't you don't stop developing these skills, like in K to eight. right? So I wonder if there's other ways that you kind of saw us providing opportunities for students to engage in developing these skills? In our course structure?



Amanda Krause 10:53

Yeah, one thing that I think was really important is this opportunity for self reflection. You know, we had that self evaluation that we did at the end of two weeks, where we asked them, you know, what they felt they learned how they were actually feeling about the material. And I think having a formal way of asking them to engage in self reflection can be really beneficial. And I think from my understanding, a lot of them actually enjoyed that opportunity as well.



Heather Woods 11:23

Mm hmm. I hope so.



Amanda Krause 11:25

Yeah, I think what's coming to mind is the openness of the activities, each module or each bi weekly period, there was tasks, there is activities and and things to do related to the content. But I felt like it was it was open enough that the student could put their own, like real stamp on it, from their own individual perspective from wherever they're coming from. There's a lot of diversity in the students kind of like what I mentioned in those aspects, but also students from different parts of the world, different parts of the country. And I think the assignment provided that flexibility for them to become use their self awareness to integrate parts of their perspectives and share parts of themselves that make the learning more applicable to them, the content more applicable to them, but also to develop those social emotional competencies that you may not be able to get if, if the assignments were more structured, or there was less room for flexibility in, in completing the task.



Heather Woods 12:34

Yeah. So just to kind of add some clarification there. All the assignments were fairly flexible, I think, over the the two courses that we taught together, they always had lots of options, which I think is overwhelming. For some students like coming into, you know, they're so used to having very structured like, you need to write this much, it needs to be formatted This way, you need to include these points, whereas we kind of let them decide how they would present things. It was very student focused, very, like bring your personal experiences professional practice into this, like, we need to see those connections, which I think is a huge part of adult learning, as well as making those connections to experience. But yeah, just to clarify that like, and they had an independent research project where they got to deep dive into a competency or a skill and relate it back to their professions and create like a resource or write a paper, it was up to them. How do you think that structuring, like the, the assignments and everything in that way it kind of influenced like students, you know, own skill building or opportunity to engage their skills,



Sarah Bethune 13:46

I think self management is a huge part of that just managing your time managing, making decisions in terms of what's most important, what's most relevant to me, what's going to be the best use of my time, the openness and the flexibility of these assignments, kind of forces the students to, to think about, okay, what do I care about most? Or how do I want

to use this project, which are difficult skills, and sometimes it feels like it's easier to just have someone tell you what to do, or like have it structured like and what how things are supposed to look. But I that it doesn't necessarily have the same impact or the same meaning and the skills in terms of Yeah, decision making and managing yourself and this project is really, like you have full ownership over it. Not only are they key comp competencies and the social emotional learning realm, but they're just applicable for any profession or managing your daily life, your own personal chores, tasks, errands but then like your professional obligations, because Well, they kind of go hand in hand.

A

Amanda Krause 15:02

Yeah. And to add to that I think you don't often see courses was such a diverse with students who have such diverse experiences. So that I thought was really interesting to partake in. Because, you know, they were in discussion with each other, and they had such a unique things to share. And I think it really added to the course. And I think the flexibility in the assignments allowed for creativity as well. And just being able to choose, you know, what's relevant to their profession, or what's important to them. And also, you know, be able to share some of their experiences and expertise in certain areas.



Heather Woods 15:41

Yeah. And I think, like, you bring up an interesting point, both of you have mentioned kind of the diverse group that we get at the graduate level in education. And so our program, it has a health professions education program, there's teaching and learning, there's leadership, there's curriculum, there's, you know, all these different aspects of teaching, but then also, health professions and like, oftentimes, and leadership, like people may not have a teaching degree, they're in a different leadership type role, but looking to get into like leadership education, or leadership training, so they, you know, sign up for this graduate course. And I think, oftentimes, and what we were seeing in a lot of the time is in the open discussion rooms, people were like, oh, like, I hadn't thought about it that way, or like seeing how it applies to different professions, I think, particularly Sarah, in our course, where they were able to talk about their professional practice, quite a bit, because we were talking about leadership across domains. But I think having that open discussion room, where everyone kind of was sharing some experiences, but then on the flip side, we also had, like, the specialized discussion rooms, where they were more with like, their similar professional peers, I think, created a really interesting dynamic that they could have that kind of group where they really related, but then also have that opportunity to see what is happening across domains, which was really, really neat to watch.



Sarah Bethune 17:17

To add to that, too, I noticed that a lot of the students had just varying levels of experience, like some of them, you know, might have been much younger, or they were just, you know, at the beginning of their careers and other people were taking courses, but they were, you know, 20 years into their careers. So it was also really interesting to see that dynamic.



Heather Woods 17:37

Mm hmm. And I think right off the bat, we were trying to really be explicit, and highlighting everyone's expertise, like, Yes, I have expertise in social and emotional learning. But that doesn't mean I know everything. And I don't know, you know, that how it applies to the whole world. You know, I have very specialized knowledge, but everybody's experiences and expertise was valuable in that course. So I think the different expertise and professions plus the different ages, I think, I would like to think you can correct me if I'm wrong, but we did try to create a climate that everyone's perspectives and experiences were important and valued. And I think everybody was able to really learn off of, you know, each other, with that kind of climate. I mean, within their introductions on all their introductions, I was saying, like, Oh, this is so great. You bring this to the course or, you know, um, so yeah, I think, I don't know, it was I think we did all right, and creating a decent climate, for sharing and valuing each other's perspectives.



Amanda Krause 18:56

I think when I was teaching, or the teaching assistant for the social emotional learning course, that was this past winter semester, so from January to April, which is also when COVID-19 was introduced into our lives. I'm late, that's the nicest way of putting it. And so I think I remember looking at these open discussion boards between the students and their groups, and everyone's sharing the different perspectives and the challenges that they have been facing as they're trying to cope with this pandemic, going to school, parenting, what does work look like? Now all of these things are changing. And the amount of support that the students are giving each other and this like empathy that they were offering one other and just sharing their own different perspectives because they were all in we were in similar boats but we're all in are in different boats to in our in our situations looked really different from one to the next. And I remember, just, I mean, it was difficult, but seeing the support that each student was offering and the understanding that your student was offering that was really cool to see. And I don't think is not necessarily often seen in online courses, that sense of community, that sense of belongingness. That sense of people care about what I have to say, or even if I get a little vulnerable, or share

something more personal, I'm not going to be made to feel bad about it, like people are going to understand me and accept me still. I think that was something that was important from, like, as a teaching team, we also brought those same characteristics to the students. And then the students shared those characteristics with each other.



Heather Woods 20:53

Mm hmm.



Amanda Krause 20:53

So yeah, I just, that was really cool. And that was a really difficult transitional period.



Heather Woods 20:59

Yeah, certainly. Earlier, I said it was Sarah, that was with me during that time. But no, you're totally right. It was you and I, Amanda, that did the transition to COVID times. Just goes to show that we've been in this for too long. All my time, is blurring together. Yeah, I think, you know, creating that climate and creating those opportunities for less academic type interactions. Like, I think their small groups, we call them professional learning communities, provided that kind of less structured, we had questions for them to answer, but what's working well, and kind of lots of reflective questions, but I think they really used many of them use that as an opportunity to, you know, have less formal conversations. So yeah, I think, you know, it really helped create the atmosphere that we had, where everything was quite open and a strong community. Any other kind of thoughts on on skills that we engaged with ourselves or fostered with our students during the academic term?



Amanda Krause 22:14

I guess you could say one thing is that we really tried to ask questions to facilitate reflection and further thinking. And, you know, there wasn't necessarily this relationship. I mean, I know Amanda mentioned it earlier, but this relationship of like, a weird hierarchy between the teaching team and the students, it really felt like it was a really collaborative experience. And that, you know, it was it was more of a discussion, and we were asking questions back and forth. And I think that was quite beneficial. Yeah,



Heather Woods 22:52

certainly, yeah, I miss you both this term, I don't have a teaching assistant, or teaching team, but it would have been really fun to have both of you on and kind of this term, I'm experimenting with, like, way more flexibility than we did previously. And I think, yeah, it would have been just really fun for us all to work together and see how that works out. But I'm on my own this term. Was there anything that you, you know, saw us implementing or me trying to implement that kind of didn't work so well, in terms of trying to foster like community or, you know, opportunities for student reflection and critical thinking,



Amanda Krause 23:41

I think, Okay. I don't know if this directly answers your question. But at least in the course that we taught together, and you had a How are you poll for students to fill out? Obviously, it was not obligatory. But just so that they could tell us tell us how they're doing. And it was private, but it was a way for us to be able to check in and for the students to, yeah, to have autonomy over that as well. And I might not be remembering correctly, but I don't know how often it was used. And I wondered about, like, it's such a good idea. And then I wondered why students didn't fill it out as like that often. And maybe some of the barriers, barriers to that possibly, from looking at it from this, like the teaching team. And then the students and I don't know if this is me thinking out loud, but that's something that came to mind when you ask that question.



Heather Woods 24:47

Yeah, I know. Like we sent it out kind of right when the pandemic hit just to check in with students. And perhaps if I had like, continued to send it out, I mean, the pandemic it fairly late in the course, there's only a few weeks left. But yeah, I know, Sarah and I sent it out as well, I believe once during the term, and again, it didn't have a huge, probably even less response rate due to I think people kind of get uncomfortable, not comfortable. But, you know, they're, they're coping already with the pandemic, it wasn't a fresh thing. But I mean, each time we still had one or two people that wanted me to reach out to them. But yeah, I think I do wonder how that can be used better, or continue to break down those that kind of sense of hierarchy and maybe not wanting to disclose if something's up.



Sarah Bethune 25:43

Yeah, because that's Yeah, what came up? That was one thing that I wondered about was, no matter how hard you try to dismantle this power imbalance between teacher teaching team and students, it's something that is so ingrained in us that we experience from, like

four years old and kindergarten, even like before then. And so it's a, I wonder from the students perspective of like, I do want to reach out, but I don't know how, like, where my comfort level is in that. And then thinking about is, yeah, is this something that, like, the teachers and educators should be this role for students, because it's so embedded within social emotional competencies, this empathy, just like I care about you, beyond just being a student, like, I care about you as a person, and I want to get to know you, and I want to make sure you're okay.



Heather Woods 26:45

Mm hmm. Yeah. And I think it feeds into, at least mine, my own philosophy of teaching is, if you're not building those connections with students, you know, it's beneficial to the learning process, and allows them to fully engage if they, you know, have that founding relationship of trust, and know that, like, you know, you're there and understand or will support them and understand that they're not just a student, they are, you know, a parent or a sibling, or a caretaker of, you know, you know, they have other things outside of school. Um, and also, I think it's part of just my philosophy to teaching is that you're teaching people and people aren't just consuming knowledge there. There's different aspects to them that need to be nurtured for them to be able to learn and engage with that knowledge. But yeah, I know that that's, I mean, makes me think of so many things. But I won't ramble. Any other challenges that you kind of saw us facing? Or maybe you were mitigating for me behind?



Amanda Krause 28:00

One thing I noticed, although I feel like this is a very common problem throughout the semester. So I'm really not sure what the answer here is. But the participation as the semester goes on, usually drops a little bit. And I started to notice that people were having maybe a bit more difficulty engaging in the group sometimes, or even, you know, responding to their assessment notebooks. And I just wonder, you know, what the answer to that is, I don't really have it, but it's just something I noticed.



Heather Woods 28:35

Amanda did you notice that at all? and unique situation, though?



Sarah Bethune 28:39

Yeah, I'm really trying to reflect back on that time, because it was a little bit ago, and the

end of our semester was not normal. No. I think I just remember, people needed flexibility. People needed time assistance, understanding from us, because barriers were coming up that they had never anticipated before, that were getting in the way of their schooling, which made it difficult for them to complete things by the deadlines that we had originally set. And I remember students reaching out to us saying like, this is up in my life, like I'm dealing with this. I don't know if I'm going to have time and then asking for extensions, or just like, yeah, support in completing the assignments, when may they be before if COVID-19 wasn't a thing, then they may not have required that.



**Heather Woods** 29:42

Yeah, and I know, like, even feedback from students when we, during the spring, I think a lot of students sign we're like, I have all this free time. I'm gonna take like four condensed courses. And that's just silly. That's a lot lot like condensed courses, Oh, my goodness. So I think I know a few of them, I got messages saying like, you know, nearing the mid to later end of the term. They were just so overwhelmed, because they'd signed up for way too much and then still had jobs or, you know, this, that. And the other thing, you know, I think we did our best to kind of let them know that that was okay. And so maybe that also leads to the disengagement a little bit, because they know that we understand to some extent, ideally, they'd stay engaged. And so, you know, that's definitely something I think to work on and think about is sustaining that engagement, which I think is a concern for all courses. So I think my final question to you both is, do you think how we approach teaching over the last two terms, so spring, summer and winter was more work than like a typical teaching team effort?



**Amanda Krause** 31:04

I think, yes, it is more work. If you are actively engaged, we were actively engaged as a teaching team, commenting and discussions, keeping up with those providing individualized, like personal feedback to students, that wasn't just a single sentence, it was a whole paragraph. And it was really talking about what the student had offered in their, their assignment. So it is more work. But it's more rewarding and more meaningful, I think, personally, for both, like, on the teaching side, and from the student side. So it's not like this work is not being reciprocated, you're getting something back tenfold. So I would say yes, more work, but worth the work. Yeah, I agree with what Amanda saying completely. And I also think, as someone like, as part of the teaching team, I think it was also just a really interesting experience for me, because it felt like, you know, I was learning a lot as well. And I was engaging with them. And, you know, it was really interesting experience.



Heather Woods 32:15

No, I think like, I agree, like, it is certainly more work. But I think it's it's more engaging. Yeah, like you're saying, Sarah, like, it's more engaging for us as the teaching team to be that involved. I don't necessarily think it's sustainable. If you've got like, multiple courses, like I think, probably do a couple of courses if I wasn't also doing my dissertation at the same time. But you know, like, if you've got like a full course load, and you're teaching like four courses at a time or something like that's not sustainable to be doing that level of engagement with your students. But, I mean, that's a commentary on just workloads that we won't get into. But yeah, I think it's it's so rewarding to watch, especially with the self directed projects, like, we scaffolded that for them. So that they were kind of working on chunks throughout the course. And so we're actively involved the whole process of like thinking through things with them and offering suggestions or resources or articles to look into. Yeah, and for me, that's just very rewarding. I like being part of you know, that process. So yeah, it was certainly takes a long time. But like you said, Amanda, it's so worth it.



Sarah Bethune 33:37

Yeah. And I, I think, seeing the students experience, the course and how we had organized it and how we were involved with it. I guess the word I'm thinking of is refreshing, it's refreshing to them, because higher ed, graduate level courses, particularly online courses just don't look like this.



Heather Woods 33:59

Mm hmm.



Amanda Krause 34:00

And a lot of ways, and so there was a lot of I sensed a lot of appreciation and just like happiness to be a part of this course there is a gratefulness and as being on the teaching team, that was also those I had similar feelings. And so seeing the students respond so positively to being part of a course that was designed in such a way that was really cool as well.



Heather Woods 34:27

Yeah. Certainly, any other kind of Final thoughts about you know, how we structured the

course I'll have to put in the show notes, kind of our syllabus or something. So people can kind of get a better idea of how we laid everything out. But yeah, any other final thoughts on like, integrating and thinking about finding opportunities to engage with social emotional competencies in kind of higher ed learning?



Sarah Bethune 34:56

I think understanding Like, you don't have to do it all at once. You can do bits and pieces. So offering like little mindfulness exercises or a video on empathy or just like having an activity that highlights diversity and taking other people's perspectives integrated to the content of whatever course you're teaching. It doesn't have to be the whole thing, because that feels overwhelming. And it is a lot of work. So it's not may not even be feasible. But I think, take what you can and go from there. Because I think, from our experiences, at least, it was very positive from the student perspective. And it may be worth integrating into a course that has nothing to do with social emotional learning, or teaching and see how your how the students respond.



Heather Woods 35:52

Yeah, definitely,



Amanda Krause 35:53

I don't know. To add to that. I also think that modeling some of these social emotional competencies and trying to actually integrate them into the course, rather than just, let's say, reading about it, or reflecting on a reading, it was a little bit more than that it was actually practicing some of the competencies, which I think had a lot of value.



Heather Woods 36:13

Mm hmm. Yeah, no, I think, you know, we did do our best to integrate. And I mean, it's not easy, but providing those opportunities, like, you know, just structuring, okay, you're, you have this project, like maybe make a SMART goal about it, and like break it down. And like helping students kind of implement these, you know, study or goal setting strategies. Without being like overly like, this is time management. This is how you set a goal. Like it's just like a subtle way of working in it. I think which is, is super helpful to the students as well. And then it's not like you're throwing this stuff at them kind of thing. It's more subtle and integrated. Well, thank you both so much for chatting with me today. It's so great to kind of brainstorm and talk about how things went over the last few terms. And I was

certainly grateful to have you part of the teaching team, you both brought so much to the course, in terms of how we did feedback and how we communicated with students and really creating that community. So I definitely miss you both. But thank you both so much for taking time out of your very busy Start of fall schedules to chat with me. I really, really appreciate it.



Amanda Krause 37:36

This is fun.



Sarah Bethune 37:37

It's really nice to see you guys.



Heather Woods 37:39

So you've been listening to the SEL in Action podcast. The podcast where we talk about social emotional competencies in professional and educational settings. Today, I was very fortunate enough to speak to my teaching team for the last two semesters, Amanda Krause and Sarah Bethune, talking about how we kind of fostered community and engagement throughout our graduate level courses that we were teaching last two terms. And so if you want to continue the conversation, feel free to reach out to us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It's SEL in Action or SEL-in-action.com. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about how you foster community and engage social emotional competencies in your classrooms. Until next time, this is Heather Woods. Thank you for listening.