

BUILDING STUDENTS' SOFT SKILLS

Try the classroom activities below to build soft skills in your students. Also take a look at the student resources to see the many activities students can do to build skills on their own and see if you can support these practices in your classroom. The icons next to each method can help you see which domains you are building.



SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	SELF MANAGEMENT	INNOVATION	COOPERATION	EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE
Leadership Conversational Expressive Persuasive Energy Regulation	Goal Regulation Decision Making Task Management Organization Detail Management Rule Following Consistency Time Management Responsibility Management	Creativity Information Processing Cultural Competence Artistic Self-Reflection Abstract Thinking	Perspective Taking Social Warmth Teamwork Capacity for Trust Ethical Capacity	Stress Regulation Optimism Anger Management Confidence Regulation Independence Adaptability Impulse Regulation

Build a classroom community



Spend time doing get to know you activities. You can play 2 truths and a lie where students create three statements about themselves and one is untrue. Each person shares their three statements and others guess which one is untrue. Giving students a chance to learn about each other in a more personal way builds skills that lead to more effective collaboration and innovation. They are able to expand their perspectives and work together more effectively.

Simulations and Role Playing



We learn through experience, emotion and repetition. Any time you can include a simulation to let students "experience" the learning, the deeper their learning will be. Try simulating real life scenarios where they have to understand others' perspectives. For example, have them explain a medical condition to a patient using the biology terms they are learning. Or, have them work as a materials team in a manufacturing facility to discuss chemistry and what materials would be best suited for a product.



JAKAPA

Don't forget to use JAKAPA's peer assessment to help your students understand how other's perceive their skills

“ JAKAPA could transform the student understanding of the value of academic team projects.

Dr. Steven Austin Stovall
Assistant Professor Southeast
Missouri University

Debates



Debates can be very helpful in building cooperation, especially when you make your students assume the viewpoints of someone else. For example, you might stage a debate between a Senator and a CEO of a large chemical company as they try to decide on environmental regulations. You can also do debates between characters in a novel to get at thematic issues. For example, you can have Atticus Finch debate a jury member who believe Tom is guilty.

Collaborative Writing



Have students work together to produce essays, exam questions or create stories or research plans. Most writing in the workplace is collaborative, so having students learn to take on a specific task and share the responsibility for producing the written word can be a powerful experience to learn cooperation, time management and social engagement.

Build-a-Story



Have students work in teams where one student writes the first two lines of a story then passes the story to the next student. The next student draws a card that says one of the following: add to setting or exposition, introduce a character, create an action, provide depth to a character, or create a conflict. That student then writes three or four sentences and passes it to the next student. Repeat the process with each member of the group and then continue to cycle around for a prescribed amount of time. Have the students read their stories aloud and vote on the best ones. Give other groups the story starters and have them revise it until it is a polished story.



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Think-Pair-Share



Periodically stop during a lesson and ask students to turn and talk with a partner. Make sure you have a prompt that will elicit useful conversation. Don't prompt them with something that has a clear answer. Rather, let them talk about things that are more abstract. The key to good think-pair-share facilitation is making sure you have a quality prompt and appropriate timing that will allow for enough conversation, but not so much time that the conversation gets off track.

Seminars



Socratic Seminars are great for students to engage in meaningful discussions. To set them up, you can have teams of students prepare one aspect of your classroom curriculum. Then they become the expert team. Perhaps give them an ethical issue related to your field. For example, if you teach history, you can have students become experts on specific aspects of colonialism and then host a discussion on whether or not we should colonize another planet if we know there is intelligent life there, but our planet is dying without their resources. They need to back up their points with specific examples from history. Your role as the facilitator is to ask probing questions to get students to think more deeply.

What would you do reflections



Ask students to put themselves in other people's shoes, identify how they would feel about various situations and describe what they would do. You can do this with characters in a literature class. After a conflict in a story, have students determine whether or not the character's response made things better or worse. Have them make a connection to a time in their life when their actions either helped or hurt a situation. In science classes, teach the people behind the innovations and the scrutiny they faced in many circumstances. Have students reflect on how they would handle rejection or doubt if they were innovators ahead of their time. In history classes, have students consider the actions of a leader. Encourage them to ask why the leader responded that way based on what they know about the person's temperament, family history, values, etc. Have them relate to the historical figure by identifying how their temperament, family history and values impacts the way they handle problems. Have them identify what they would have done differently if they were the leader faced with the historical dilemma.



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Focus on failure



Students are often afraid to take risks and face failure. Try making failure the goal, so you are rewarding risk taking and experimentation. For example, instead of having practice work at the beginning of a class where students complete problems and warm up, put them in groups and give them a number of problems or examples. Ask them to sort the examples into ones that are correct and ones that are wrong. Then ask them to find the faulty thinking that makes the problems wrong. The purpose of the exercise is to figure out what went wrong rather than go through the motions to get the right answer. Students have to think more deeply to discover what went wrong and why. You can also try inquiry learning. After very minimal instruction, give students a problem to figure out together. For example, if you are doing a unit on electricity, give students light bulbs and wires and any other equipment they need to create circuits and give them five minutes to try to light up the bulb. Ask them to record each thing they try and note whether it worked or not. After five minutes, have each group share what they tried and create a t-chart on the board with a + side and a faulty thinking side. As students identify the faulty thinking (ex. they didn't close the circuit), write the faulty thinking on the board. Put what worked under the + side. This can be used as a method to teach a process. List the faulty thinking on a FAIL board (First Attempt In Learning) and remind students to refer to it during the unit to remember what didn't work and why. Learning is often about experimentation and failure. Focusing on failure will actually lead to deeper learning, because students learn more than how to get a right answer. They understand the reason behind what is correct and what is not.

Play 4 Corners



Ask students to take a position on something they have learned in class. Have them go to a corner of the room based on whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. Give groups ten minutes to discuss why they agree or disagree and have them put together some talking points to try to convince others to join them. Give each group 3 or so minutes to try to persuade their classmates to agree with their perspective. After all groups have presented their points, repeat the original question and tell students to go to the corner they most agree with. Give groups points for each person that moves to their corner. The group that persuaded the most people to come to their corner wins.

Test corrections and goal setting



Instead of just having students complete test corrections, have them complete a reflection that identifies how they studied and why they think that process worked or did not work. This practice can help them build when-then statements. They will learn that WHEN they study with flashcards, THEN they remember information better than if they just re-read notes. Have them set a study goal that builds on what they learned about how they study most effectively. Include a question on the assessment that asks them to describe the process they used to study and why they think it was or was not effective.



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Build the 3R System



Help students learn to manage their responsibilities and tasks by using the 3R system. This process is detailed in the Time Management Student Resources. The 3Rs are Recognize, Reduce and Rank. Have students make a task list. Mark Twain once said that if you eat a frog for breakfast then all the food the rest of the day will taste good. Ask students to RECOGNIZE their frog from their list. This is the task they don't want to do because they don't like to do it or they are anxious about doing it. Next, have them identify tasks that will only take a few minutes to complete. These are the REDUCE tasks. Sometimes, our anxiety and procrastination is due to feeling overwhelmed. Noting which tasks will be easy and quick to complete can help students quickly reduce their list to a more manageable size. Finally, ask students to reflect on how they work best and RANK their tasks. Some students may learn that in order to be productive, they need to tackle the tasks they enjoy first. Others may want to complete the reduce tasks, so their list is less daunting. Some may want to do their frog first and get it out of the way, so they can stop worrying about it. After a few days or a week, check in with students on how their task list is coming. Have them discuss the process they are using to stay on track and manage their time. Ask students to identify one new strategy they heard about from their peers and try it over the next few days or week. Make the 3R process part of your classroom routine when you introduce a unit or a large project.

Request to Retest



Allow students to request to retest by creating a Request to Retest form. Include the following:
Basics (name, date, class period and concept to retest)

Reflect

Previous Score _____

Why do you think you earned this score? What didn't you understand? How did you prepare for the test?

List three activities you will do to improve your understanding of this concept:

Items to Attach

- Previous test with corrections in red pen
- Proof of your activities

Date of Retest _____

Request

I request the opportunity to retest this concept. I have worked hard to improve my understanding of this concept.

Student's Signature: _____

Parent's Signature (for K12 students): _____



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Exit tickets



At the end of class when you have had teams working together, have each individual member complete an exit ticket where you ask them something about their group process. For example, "What is one decision your team struggled with today and how did you resolve it?" If the individual responses match, the team gets points. If not, they were clearly not working as a team and cooperating.

You are a star



Students of all ages love stickers and prizes. At the end of each unit or project, select some super stars to recognize and give them a sticker, certificate, candy bar or other reward. Do not select superstars based on their achievement during the unit or project. Instead reward positive behaviors you want to reinforce.

Try the following types of rewards:

The try try and try again award: For the student who showed the most persistence

The innovation award: For the student who had creative ideas or asked thoughtful questions

The teammate award: For the student who helped others the most

The optimist award: For the student who encouraged others

The task master award: For the student who kept their team on track and managed time well

Rewarding students will reinforce positive behaviors and encourage others to engage in that behavior. When you present the awards, share the concrete behaviors you saw that led you to select a student for recognition. This will help clarify and define expectations and establish role models for others. It will also reward effort over achievement.

Show that you Know!



Provide choices for students to show you what they know. If you provide clear rubrics and/or checklists of the academic outcomes you expect students to master, you can judge their mastery in many different ways. Allow students to design their own way to show you they know. As long as what they produce provides evidence of mastery as defined by your rubric or checklist, then students can earn an A. When you allow for this creativity, you will be surprised at the level of thinking your students will do and the way they will connect your content to their own interests. Learning happens through repetition, emotion and experience. Freedom of choice is a powerful way to engage emotions and experiences, which will lead to deeper learning and deeper relationships with your students.

Group Process Rubric



At the completion of a group project, have students complete the rubric below and take a JAKAPA peer assessment. We measure what matters and having students measure their process will help them see that group projects are about more than just a grade. What we learn through the process of working collaboratively is as important as the content we learned. Have students set personal goals based on their self-assessment and peer assessments. When you assign the next group project, ask students to share their goals with their teammates, so they can work together to help each other achieve them.

Team Skill		1: No	2: At times	3: Yes
Group participation	I know how to have a courteous and productive conversation with almost anyone.			
	I do my fair share of work when collaborating with others.			
Time management and responsibility	I have the patience to try again (and again) after failure.			
	I stay organized and finish my work on time.			
Creativity and originality	I come up with “out of the box” ideas.			
	I have an artistic flair for presenting with style.			
Communication	I effectively express ideas through writing and speaking.			
	I can give and take constructive criticism.			
General team skills	I am able to evaluate what is more important, and what is less important.			
	I bring out the best in others.			
Technical skills	I am good at sourcing information through reading and listening.			
	I use numbers to find meaning (e.g. averages, trends, graphs).			