ELEMENT 2: UNDERSTAND THE BASICS OF THE CASEL 5 (FOR SEL) AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

PBL+ Framework

1. Understand the Elements of Research-Informed PBL

2. Introduce SEL and Critical Life Skills

3. Know Your Students to Inform Your Teaching

4. Design Relevant Projects

5. Provide Timely Feedback
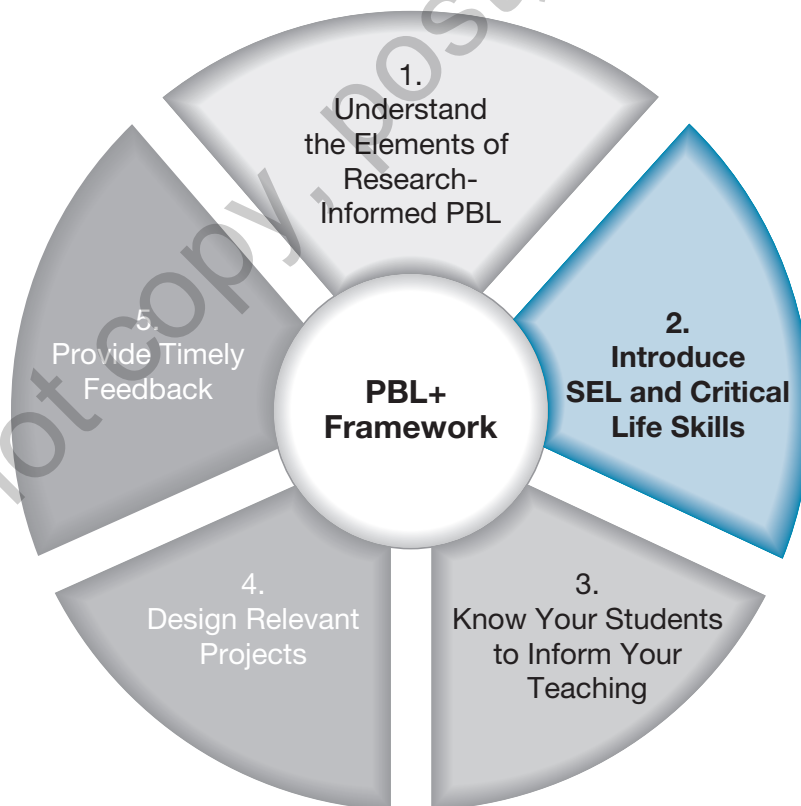
This chapter provides the foundational knowledge required for integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into your project-based learning (PBL) units and the emotional intelligence (EQ) skills needed to successfully implement the subsequent steps in the PBL+ Framework. As you read this, you may wonder why I included SEL and EQ in a book for PBL+ or why they are included in a new PBL framework. The answer is simple: our kids have always struggled with their social and emotional well-being. Unfortunately, the pandemic has exacerbated the need for SEL—schools will need to help young people recover from emotional and mental health challenges experienced during COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021) and in life as they get older. To assist us, we will explore data reported by the CDC (2021) and learn strategies to increase our understanding of how to use SEL effectively in PBL.

PBL is not the only teaching methodology we can use to uplift SEL in classrooms, but high-quality PBL has been shown to effectively promote the SEL of students (Baines et al., 2021) and be a powerful addition to our teaching arsenal if we understand what we're trying to accomplish with students. Through my own action research, I have found that putting numbers to issues or topics we're studying can strengthen buy-in from colleagues and inform effective school programs. The goal here is to do such transformative and compelling work that others will want to join you and create similar learning experiences for their students. Furthermore, applying the knowledge in this chapter will help you activate SEL purposefully and as needed in both your non-PBL lessons and personal life.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

► Readers will be able to

- establish the need for uplifting SEL in PBL,

- review research that supports SEL across the curriculum,

- understand the multifaceted skillsets associated with the CASEL 5, and

- assist students with emotional regulation by implementing a tool designed to boost self- and social awareness.

STUDENTS NEED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT MORE THAN EVER

I remember my first year of teaching as being difficult, and then each subsequent year it got easier as I improved at the job. However, the last three school years have been the most difficult I've had to navigate as both a student and a 20-year veteran teacher. For many educators, each of the last three years has also become more challenging to navigate, and the emotional toll on students is devastating. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported their first representative survey on the mental health of high school students in the U.S. during

the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 the data revealed that our children are hurting and tell us the following (CDC, 2021):

- 37% of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 44% said they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the time in quarantine in 2020.

- 36% of students reported experiencing racism before or during the COVID-19 pandemic. The highest among Asian students at 64% and 55% of Black students and students of multiple races.

Things haven't been easy for some students in family life either. The report (CDC, 2021) also revealed the following:

- 55% reported enduring emotional abuse by a parent or caregiver, including swears, insults, and put-downs.

- 11% experienced physical abuse by a parent or caregiver, including various forms of physical violence.

- 29% reported that a parent or caregiver lost a job.

It's clear from the data that many American youths are living through tremendous trauma and feel they cannot rely on the most important adults in their lives. Many are sitting in classrooms attempting to learn through their trauma. If it's overwhelming for us to teach them, imagine how they feel, and the social and emotional skills many will need to learn at school because they can't get them from home.

There is an undeniable need for us to integrate SEL into classroom learning—especially now that many school systems have begun opening back up post-pandemic. This is also an opportunity for educators to help students with the social and emotional support they actually need. Kathleen A. Ethier, PhD, director of CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health, states:

> School connectedness is a key to addressing youth adversities at all times—especially during times of severe disruptions. . . . Students need our support now more than ever, whether by making sure that their schools are inclusive and safe or by providing opportunities to engage in their communities and be mentored by supportive adults. (CDC, 2021, para. 8)

Luckily the education world is no longer a stranger to SEL or its five competencies known as the CASEL 5—designed for teachers to integrate into their lessons by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, n.d.-b.). We will now dive into the basics of the CASEL 5 and later integrate them as the central skills in projects uplifting the core elements of effective projects in Part 2 of this book.

THE CASEL 5

CASEL is the leader in research and resources for understanding and implementing SEL (CASEL, n.d.-a). CASEL lists five SEL competencies educators can use to help learners better understand their environment, themselves, and others, known and referred to as the *CASEL 5* (CASEL, n.d.-b.). When enacted in lessons properly, the CASEL 5 can provide learners with the foundational EQ and life skills necessary to become better students and people. The CASEL 5 and associated skills include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. **Self-awareness:** The ability to correctly understand the impact of one's own emotions on their thoughts, body, and behavior. Self-awareness skills include the following:
   - Expressing one's emotions accurately by labeling them
   - Understanding how difficult emotions impact overall well-being
   - Taking an accurate personal inventory of one's strengths and limitations
   - Setting attainable goals
   - Possessing high levels of confidence and a positive mindset

2. **Self-management:** The ability to manage one's thoughts and behaviors and effectively work toward the attainment of personal, academic, or professional goals. Social-management strategies include the following:
   - Regulating emotions
   - Thinking critically to problem-solve in complex and high-stress situations
   - Controlling impulses
   - Delaying personal gratification for the greater good
   - Empowering one's self-motivation
   - Completing tasks (e.g., assignments, chores, responsibilities)

3. **Social awareness:** The ability to empathize and take the perspective of others (including diverse individuals), even when it doesn't align with one's own life outlook or values. Social awareness qualities include the following:
   - Empathizing with others
   - Recognizing and appreciating diversity
   - Knowing standards of appropriate behavior along with social and ethical norms
   - Having good listening skills

4. **Relationship skills:** The ability to foster healthy and uplifting personal and professional relationships, including with people from diverse backgrounds. Good relationship skills include the following:
   - Respecting others unconditionally
   - Communicating clearly and appropriately to the intended audience

- Listening to understand
- Collaborating well with others
- Resisting social pressure when it conflicts with one's values
- Resolving conflicts fairly
- Seeking assistance from others

5. **Responsible decision making:** The ability to make well-thought-out decisions while monitoring the impact on self and others and honoring ethical, safety, and social norms. Good decision making includes the following:
   - Being outcomes orientated
   - Monitoring one's intention and impact
   - Making inferences based on facts and evidence
   - Using critical thinking skills to analyze alternatives in the decision-making process
   - Considering one's well-being and that of others before deciding

Teachers beginning to implement the CASEL 5 into lessons should consider that all of the five competencies are related and can function concurrently. The three project exemplars in Part 2 of this book will feature their interconnectedness so that teachers can intentionally begin integrating SEL skillsets where they logically fit—instead of in isolation. For example, in CASEL's integrated framework graphic, *self-awareness* and *self-management* focus on skillsets related to self and are featured in the color orange. *Social awareness* and *relationship skills* concentrate on skills and attributes related to others and appear in the color green (CASEL, 2021). And *responsible decision-making skills* work simultaneously with the other four (CASEL, 2021).

Making students aware of these correlations throughout learning can also help them understand the multifaceted use of the SEL skills they're learning along with academic and career knowledge. Furthermore, teachers should emphasize how one competency works with the others with students (see Table 2.1, page 26). These are powerful emotional intelligence-building concepts for learners of all ages to understand, and ones that Part 2 of this book will further explore in Chapters 6–8.

For the emotional growth addressed in Table 2.1 to occur, students must frequently practice applying skills in the CASEL 5—repetition is the mother of skill. According to Hattie (2009), an important item for teachers to consider is that although modeling and discussing SEL strategies with students as needed is impactful to learning—interventions are most effective when applied in 40 lessons or more. Student growth, therefore, requires educators to intentionally and thoughtfully weave the CASEL 5 into their instruction. The following section provides grounding research to support applying the CASEL 5 SEL framework in classroom lessons and projects.

**TABLE 2.1   THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE CASEL 5
SEL COMPETENCIES**

CASEL 5 COMPETENCY	STUDENT LEARNING	CONNECTIONS TO ANOTHER COMPETENCY
Self-Awareness	Students learn about self-awareness by beginning to explore how they experience difficult emotions.	Students can now find and implement strategies for regulating difficult emotions to strengthen the self-management process.
Self-Management	Students learn that self-management involves critical thinking as well as impulse control.	Students can now learn to use responsible decision-making strategies by weighing the pros and cons of their actions and behavior.
Social Awareness	Students learn that empathy is critical to relationship building.	Students can now use relationship skills that uplift the importance of understanding and honoring the experience of others.
Relationship Skills	Students learn about how social pressure from peers may cause them to participate in bullying weaker peers.	Students can now learn to use responsible decision-making strategies by choosing to become an ally.
Responsible Decision Making	Students learn how their good decisions can positively impact them and others in their school community.	Students can now learn to use strategies that promote both social awareness and self-management skills.

RESEARCH THAT INFORMED THE CASEL SEL FRAMEWORK

Through years of rigorous research beginning in 1994, CASEL has developed the CASEL 5 integrated framework and has advanced the scientific base for SEL by continuously refining their own research, aligning efforts with notable work in the field, and spotlighting essential studies. Unfortunately, I haven't seen many school districts delve into the research or conduct their own to determine what works for them. Instead, they purchase SEL curriculum and expect teachers to implement it without personalizing the content for students. This approach usually won't work for every learner and may cause teachers to view SEL as one more item they need to check off their to-do list. Previous meta-analyses show that SEL is not a "one-size-fits-all" intervention. The highest impact (largest effect size) occurs when SEL experiences are intentionally personalized to learners' unique context or culture (Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017; Wiglesworth et al., 2016).

You shouldn't feel like you have to design SEL activities for your PBL units from scratch or think that scripted resources have no value. Instead, I encourage you to tweak, personalize, and adapt resources as you consider your students'

unique SEL and academic needs. After all, element four of the PBL+ Framework invites you to adapt projects but make them your own. There's nothing wrong with drawing inspiration from reputable works as long as we are not sticking to a script. This chapter intentionally provides the foundational activities you can adapt to help both you and your kids begin strengthening EQ skills—having this insight will improve your ability to adapt confidently. Furthermore, in Part 2 of this book you will find three adaptable PBL units uplifting the CASEL 5 for you to make your own. I will suggest the sections you can personalize to impact learning best in your unique space. For now, let's continue exploring some of the supporting research.

Over 300 studies captured in four major meta-analyses support SEL in helping with academic and emotional development in both short- and long-term scenarios (Mahoney et al., 2018). A landmark meta-analysis combining data of 213 studies involving over 270,000 learners reveals that when SEL is a part of the core curriculum for multiple years, the impact on behavior and learning in schools is positive in the following ways (Durlak et al., 2011):

- Improved social behaviors and lower levels of distress

- Reduced aggression and emotional distress among students

- Increased *helping behaviors* in school

- Improved positive attitudes toward self and others

- Improved academic performance by program's end

- Increased age academic performance by 11 percent points

More encouraging data show that SEL can have long-term positive impacts on academics (up to 18 years) and personal life (such as emotional distress and substance use)—as shown in another meta-analysis involving 82 studies and 100,000 students from various countries (Taylor et al., 2017).

As you conclude this section and as we jump into the how-to, I want you to glean two essential items we learn from these data points.

1. SEL can help students live better overall lives.

2. SEL can be an academic intervention because it helps students better prepare for learning and has been shown to improve academic outcomes.

Now that we are better grounded in the critical life skills associated with the competencies in the CASEL 5 and have explored the supporting evidence for SEL, it might be easier to commit to weaving SEL into our everyday teaching. To make this pedagogical transformation smoother and to make a lasting impact on learners, consider the CASEL 5 and its set of skills as integral to student learning as the content standards uplifted in your daily lessons. If having to teach these numerous skills appears daunting—especially when you're responsible for getting through extensive content—focus on the grounding EQ skills first. I suggest beginning with your learner's unique relationship with their own emotions. They must learn to walk before learning to run.

DEMYSTIFY EMOTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Demystifying emotions for students is critical to helping them begin to understand and conquer their difficult ones and vital for assisting them in finding a peaceful state when the learning process is disrupted. Furthermore, assisting students in understanding how they uniquely experience emotions is foundational to helping them improve their EQ and other vital SEL skills (Valenzuela, 2020). Psychology tells us that emotion is a complicated state of feeling with the power to impact people's physical and psychological changes (Cherry, 2022). Our brain creates emotions by assigning meaning to bodily sensations from our lived experiences (Zimmerman, 2019). Furthermore, people experience emotions and feelings in sequential order—emotions precede feelings (Meyer, 2012), and feelings precede our moods and behavior (Valenzuela, 2021a). Unfortunately, many people (both young and old) are unaware of the depth of their emotions and how they differ from feelings, thus impacting every aspect of their life. We manifest emotions either consciously or subconsciously, bringing about feelings that we experience consciously. See Figure 2.1 for a simple illustration of the progression of emotions.
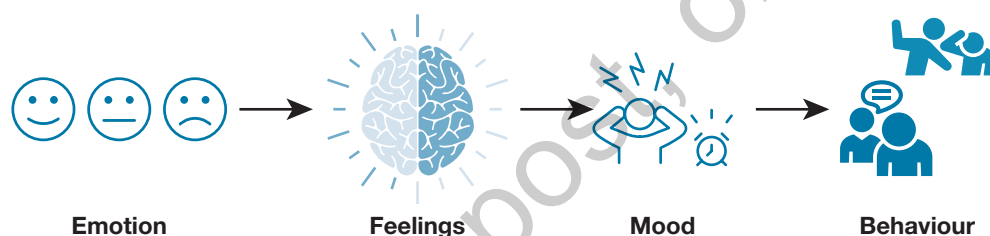
FIGURE 2.1 PROGRESSION OF EMOTIONS

Emotion → Feelings → Mood → Behaviour

IMAGE SOURCES: iStock.com/IIlerlok_Xolms, iStock.com/filo, iStock.com/matsabe, and iStock.com/appleuzr

online resources Available for download at resources.corwin.com/ProjectBasedLearning+

It's important to stress to learners that although every person experiences emotions, not every person experiences emotions in the same way. Therefore, understanding the relationship between one's lived experience is vital to deepening their understanding of how they experience emotions, especially the difficult ones. For example, fear is a powerful and primitive emotion that all humans experience, just like other emotions (anger, joy, surprise, etc.). Psychology research informs us that emotional fear involves both a universal biochemical response and a high individual emotional response alerting people to imminent danger or the threat of harm—whether physical or psychological (Fritscher, 2023). Some of us can regulate and overcome fear(s) easier than others—depending on personal trauma, exposure to good tools and resources, and ultimately heightened levels of EQ.

For example, I lived in poverty while growing up in Queens, New York. I experienced emotional fear, just like others in my peer group who did not experience poverty or grow up in Queens. Due to the difference in our life circumstances, I'm guessing some of the factors that cause them and me to experience fear and anxiety probably differ significantly. Although I can't prove my inference, it's still worth considering for assisting kids in understanding the correlations between their lived experiences and the power their emotions have on their mind, body,

and behavior. Growing up, I feared not having enough food to eat, nice clothing to wear, and the unchecked physical and verbal bullying that often occurred in my neighborhood. I can't speak for others from different life circumstances, but their fear factors will most likely differ from mine. Moreover, having different life circumstances does not mean that the fear (or difficult emotions) someone experiences doesn't cause trauma or require them to learn how to regulate it effectively. After all, fear is very real to the person experiencing it.

As we know, fear isn't the only challenging emotion youth experience daily, including in the classroom. Unfortunately, many students haven't been exposed to SEL in the classroom and are unsure how to regulate their emotions. That's where teachers can help. Learners need to be able to take a metaphoric step back when overcome with complex emotions to reflect and redirect them using a repository of trusted tools and strategies they know when and how to use. These strategies can help heal from past emotional trauma and restore inner peace daily—even when addressing discouraging situations like difficult people or a setback. A simple tool to help regulate emotions can help provide the needed steps no matter what they encounter in their life. Also, the EQ skills they develop using a simple tool (see Figure 2.2) can provide the knowledge of self that's foundational for mastering other SEL-related skills.

USE AN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLANNER

In an episode of *Queen Sugar* (one of my favorite shows), a main character, Micah West, said, "I can't control what happens, but I can control how to respond to things." This is an empowering outlook, even in the most dispiriting times. To help kids improve their responses when faced with difficult emotions, I developed a handy three-step Emotional Intelligence Planner (Valenzuela, 2021a) by using my insights from two trusted sources and listening to participant feedback in action research (Valenzuela, 2022e). These are the two sources that mainly inspired the Emotional Intelligence Planner:

1. The processing model of emotion regulation was developed by Stanford professor James Gross (1998, 2015). His research concludes that people can learn to modulate and alter the emotions they experience (Gross, 2015).

2. Plutchik's (2001) wheel of emotions, which helps learners accurately identify the emotions they experience in different situations to determine their emotional triggers. The wheel simplifies emotions by focusing on eight primary ones: (1) anger, (2) anticipation, (3) joy, (4) trust, (5) fear, (6) surprise, (7) sadness, and (8) disgust.

To get kids to begin labeling their emotions accurately, use Plutchik's wheel of emotions to recognize their emotions in different situations. Don't only have them focus on negative situations. I like to also have them investigate the emotions they experience when they have a moment of success, explore a natural setting, or do something they enjoy. This crucial practice categorizes emotions and responses to them, allowing them to learn more about their emotional states. Additionally, with practice using Plutchik's wheel, students can begin recognizing that other emotions they experience uniquely are an amalgam of the

eight basic emotions and may also intersect with secondary ones (Plutchik, 2001). People also experience secondary emotions, which are emotional reactions to an emotion, such as the feeling of shame when afraid or feeling joy resulting from happiness.

Plutchik's wheel of emotions has been simplified for children ages 4–11 using emojis to represent 10 emotions with no subcategories (Mentally Healthy Schools, n.d.).

Once kids are familiar with naming emotions, they can begin to identify emotional triggers. This practice is critical for them to plan responses with good self-regulation tactics and understand the unique impact of their emotions on their overall well-being and social interactions. To purposefully assist them with gauging where their emotions reside and identify strategies for regulating them effectively, use the Emotional Intelligence Planner (see Figure 2.2). This simple check-in can be in response to feeling off or having trouble restoring their inner peace after a difficult social interaction or an intense moment with a peer or caregiver. Sometimes youth will resist leaning into a problematic emotion. In that case, please don't rush the process; allow them space and time to restore inner peace. Once the intensity of the emotion has subsided, warmly encourage them to complete the planner and advise them that difficult emotions are vital to informing us where we need to focus and improve.

FIGURE 2.2   VALENZUELA'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLANNER

TRIGGERING SITUATION	LABEL EMOTIONS	SEL STRATEGY
Use the space provided to describe the situation that triggered you emotionally.	Eight primary emotions: ☐ Anger ☐ Anticipation ☐ Joy ☐ Trust ☐ Fear ☐ Surprise ☐ Sadness ☐ Disgust Use the space provided to elaborate on secondary emotions you may be experiencing. Use Plutchik's (2001) wheel of emotions as a reference.	☐ Self-management ☐ Social awareness ☐ Relationship skills ☐ Self-awareness ☐ Responsible decision making Use the space provided to elaborate on how you will use the EQ skills to regulate your emotions and find solutions to the problem.

online resources   Available for download at resources.corwin.com/ProjectBasedLearning+

Not every learner will initially find the EQ planner easy to complete. Remind students that emotions and feelings don't always last long (Cavell, 2004), but they will reappear when they are triggered. It's therefore critical to get a handle on understanding how their emotions impact them. Consider the EQ planner activity a cognitive process that students can use during projects and throughout the day to label and regulate emotions, restore their inner peace, and prepare for learning. Inform students that the planner is a helpful tool to help them organize their thoughts, new knowledge, reflections, and next steps regarding their complex emotions.

Furthermore, showing them a completed planner example (Figure 2.3) can help them know that other students (and adults) face difficult emotions and also need assistance managing them. I get better responses from students when they know they're not the only ones using or needing the tool.

FIGURE 2.3 VALENZUELA'S COMPLETED EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLANNER

TRIGGERING SITUATION	LABEL EMOTIONS	SEL STRATEGIES
My teacher partnered me to work with James on the class project. Working with him is fun because he is my friend, and I like being around him. The problem is he does not complete his portion of the work on time and does not listen to me when I remind him about it. For us to get a good grade, I also began to do his work. I do not want to tell my teacher because I feel James will stop being my friend.	Eight primary emotions: ☒ Anger ☐ Anticipation ☐ Joy ☐ Trust ☐ Fear ☐ Surprise ☐ Sadness ☒ Disgust Use the space provided to elaborate on secondary emotions you may be experiencing. Use Plutchik's (2001) wheel of emotions as a reference: **I feel annoyance.**	☐ Self-management ☒ Social awareness ☒ Relationship skills ☒ Self-awareness ☐ Responsible decision making Use the space provided to elaborate on how you will use the EQ skills to regulate your emotions and find solutions to the problem: **Self-awareness:** I labeled the emotion(s) I experienced. **Social awareness:** To empathize with James, I speak with him to learn what causes him not to complete his work. **Relationship skills:** I will need to set my boundaries firmly and respectfully and seek assistance from our teacher if he doesn't do his own work.

TIPS FOR USING THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLANNER

Coaching students through self and social awareness using tools like the EQ planner can assist them with managing their emotions. A tool like this can also help them accept themselves and others, understand their situations, and be less self-judgmental when experiencing unpleasant feelings like jealousy, anger, or annoyance. Before moving to the next chapter, I want to offer a few tidbits for you to consider for having learners get the most effective use of the EQ planner.

- Encourage learners to state the triggering situation objectively by sticking to the facts of what actually happened. Don't add to or take away from the event (column one).

- Have them label their emotions without negatively judging themselves or others (column two).

- Remind them this activity is not meant to change the behavior of others. Instead, they should focus on improving their responses to the triggering situation (column three).

- Improved EQ will take time and repetition. According to Hattie (2009), for SEL strategies to be highly impactful to student learning, interventions should be applied in 40 lessons or more.

- SEL does not replace professional trauma-informed therapy, nor should SEL skills be taught or utilized independently of the curriculum (Cohen et al., 2021).

SUMMARY

....

Understanding the basics of the CASEL 5 and EQ provides helpful foundational knowledge to begin activating SEL across your lessons and PBL units. Our students need SEL more than ever. The research-based resources in this chapter help teachers consider the implementation of SEL competencies to serve their unique community of learners best. Additionally, the Emotional Intelligence Planner is a simple tool designed to get learners started on their journey to emotional regulation by taking the time to unpack and regulate their difficult and triggering emotions. We now segue into Chapter 3, and the third element of the PBL+ Framework: *Use Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching*. We will learn to use what we know about our students to get to know them as people and learners and make sound instructional decisions.