

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN AN OPEN SPACE

by

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education: Natural Science and Environmental  
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## PROJECT SUMMARY

The following curriculum addresses the research question *Can open space technology (OST) be used to promote social and emotional learning in older elementary students by providing a framework for student-centered experiential learning (SEL)?*

Intentional SEL provides numerous personal and intrapersonal benefits in both the short- and long-term by providing learners with skills they will need during their learning journeys and throughout their lives, such as independence, effective collaboration, and empathy and support for diverse identities and experiences (CASEL, 2020; Katz & Porath, 2011; Martínez, 2016).

The Camper Club curriculum supports residential summer campers ages 9-12 in practicing social and emotional (SEL) skills through proposing, developing, and leading their own camp activities. Through separate sessions intended to accommodate both planning and implementation, the Camper Club curriculum provides a framework for campers to create, participate in, and reflect on their own summer camp activities, thereby practicing SEL competencies alongside their peers in programming that they develop largely autonomously.

This curriculum is based on Open Space Technology (OST), a collaborative method of group organization with West African roots that relies on participant-driven planning to create and schedule events surrounding a central idea or theme (Owen, 2008). The OST framework enables learners to practice and strengthen SEL skills in a way that is authentic, active and engaging, built on participant experience, and connected to future opportunity; that is to say, it provides an experiential framework for SEL (Carver, 1996).

The experiential nature of OST benefits learners by increasing engagement in learning and promoting higher-order thinking skills and, in return, the collaborative nature of experiential education

promotes social awareness and relationship skills central to comprehensive SEL (Ellwood & Abrams, 2017; Joplin, 2016; Ives & Obenchain, 2006).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) lays out five core competency areas that this curriculum seeks to develop: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (2020). The chart on page nine displays the five CASEL competencies, provides examples of each, and pinpoints where in the curriculum they are practiced. This curriculum is designed to be modified for different ages, group sizes, activity durations, and more.

# CAMPER CLUBS

This multi-part activity curriculum is designed to promote social and emotional learning (SEL) for summer campers aged 9-12. Through the Camper Club process laid out in this curriculum, campers will develop, propose, plan, and lead camp activities for their peers with staff support. The organizational method used to create these activities is adapted from open space technology with a focus on the five SEL competencies laid out by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

## AUDIENCE

This curriculum is intended for summer campers at week-long overnight camp. While this curriculum is certainly possible for a day camp, an overnight camp program provides more opportunity for camper self-direction. This self-direction prepares campers well for the challenge of developing and leading their own camp activities.

Though the target audience is ages 9-12, the challenge of Camper Clubs can be easily scaled to an older audience by offering more agency to campers regarding length of Camper Club activity, materials and locations that require greater responsibility and planning, greater participation in creating the schedule, and more. This is a whole-camp activity best suited to camp sizes of 20 to 150 campers.

## GOALS

Through the process of proposing, planning, completing, and debriefing the Camper Club process, camper will be empowered to:

1. Cultivate personal identity, interests, and growth.
2. Collaborate in peer groups and make responsible decisions about the well-being of oneself and others.
3. Show compassion to oneself and others during times of discomfort or conflict.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Social and emotional learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) "is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. personal and interpersonal skills, responsible decision-making skills, and the abilities to manage oneself and nurture positive relationships." <sup>1</sup>

A holistic approach, SEL addresses cognitive, behavioral, and emotional skills with the goal of both cultivating emotional skills individually and practicing them in social interaction. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies a framework of five interrelated competency areas (right).

Effective SEL has been shown to promote increased academic performance, reduce anxiety, and improve student attitudes and relationships. These benefits have been shown across all education levels and in rural, suburban, and urban schools and remain significant for a minimum of six months after SEL implementation.

#### CASEL Five Competencies

##### Self-awareness<sup>1</sup>

The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts

##### Self-management<sup>1</sup>

The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations

##### Social awareness<sup>1</sup>

The abilities to understand the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts

##### Relationship skills<sup>1</sup>

The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations

##### Responsible decision-making<sup>1</sup>

The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations

<sup>1</sup>Definition from Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2020).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONT.

### Open space technology

This curriculum is based on Open Space Technology (OST), a process of group organization with West African roots that relies on collaborative planning to create and schedule meaningful events (Owen, 2008). Group members identify interests surrounding a central topic or theme and self-organize into activity sessions, resulting in a community experience naturally tailored to participants' identities, interests, and needs.

In this curriculum, summer campers use a modified version of OST to create and lead their own camp activities: Camper Clubs. The method for facilitating Camper Clubs differs from OST in a few ways designed to meet camp safety standards and support young campers as they navigate growth situations like public speaking, leadership, and emotional management.

First, while the number of OST sessions is typically limited only by interest, the number of simultaneous Camper Clubs is instead limited by logistics such as staff availability. Whereas OST participants produce their own schedule of sessions, the schedule of Camper Clubs is ultimately created by a facilitating staff member with significant input from campers. Campers also may not move freely among sessions as OST participants are encouraged to do, but instead are restricted to the sessions they sign up for.

## LOGISTICS

Campers should experience at a least a full day of camp activities before beginning the Camper Clubs process. This lets campers settle into the camp routine, use staff-led activities as a model for their own, and have a better understanding available locations and materials.

Any of the templates below can be substituted for something as involved as a virtual message board or as simple as sticky notes and pencils. The list of materials available to campers should be considered far from exhausted. Use what works best for the structure of your camp.

### STAFF

The planning session benefits from having as many staff as possible to support campers in brainstorming and filling the staff sponsor role. Each Camper Club requires at least one staff member. A Staff Responsibilities resource is included at the end of the curriculum.

### MATERIALS: BEFORE CAMPER CLUBS

- Camper Club Proposals template
- Pencils
- Chalkboard or wall to post proposals
- Chalkboard or wall to write directions
- Tape or pushpins
- Camper Clubs Signups template
- Camper Clubs Schedule template
- Camper Club Leader Planning template

### MATERIALS: CAMPER CLUB ACTIVITIES

- Any materials available to campers
  - Craft supplies: Paper, markers, chalk, paints, cardboard, etc.
  - Measuring implements: Ruler, thermometer, kitchen scale
  - Observation tools: Binoculars, hand lens, camera
  - Capture devices: Butterfly net, bug box, terrarium
  - Information: Field guides, identification keys
  - Sports equipment: Balls, cones, nets
  - Camping supplies: Water filters, stoves, tarps
  - Things from home: Cards, games, books
- Debrief Questions template

### RECOMMENDED TIMEFRAME

- Planning session: 60 min
- Behind the scenes
  - Scheduling: Variable
  - Camper Club prep: 45 min
- Camper Club activities:
  - Introduction: 10 min
  - Activities: 2 hour, 15 min
  - Debrief: 30 min

### LOCATIONS

- Planning session: Whole-camp meeting place with room to move
- Camper Club activities: Throughout camp at facilitator discretion

## METHOD

Ideally, the initial planning session and the Camper Clubs themselves take place on different days to allow ample time for staff to create the schedule and campers to prepare for activities. As long as there is enough preparation time, the two sessions may take place on the same day. Staff should take a backseat role in both the planning and activity portions of Camper Clubs, focusing on behavior management, camper engagement, and activity support.

## PLANNING SESSION

### Introduction

*(10 min)*

1. Have campers pair up and share a favorite experience from their camp activities so far. Ask what made that experience stand out. Have a few campers share with the group. Next, have campers pair-share something that could have made one of their activities better.
2. Tell campers that they have a chance to put their thoughts into actions. Introduce the idea of Camper Clubs as an opportunity for them to not only choose upcoming activities, but plan and lead them as well! Give campers a brief overview of the Camper Club process.
  - a) We will take time to brainstorm activities and share our ideas together with the whole group.
  - b) Staff will make a schedule, then we'll sign up for the Camper Clubs we want to attend.
  - c) Camper Club leaders will have time to prepare for their Camper Clubs before leading them.
3. Campers will have many questions, but most can be held to be answered during the planning process. Remind campers of group norms regarding respect and encourage them not to get too attached to any one idea. As we brainstorm and share our activities, our ideas will grow and change, and that's good!

### Brainstorming

*(10 min)*

1. Before campers begin brainstorming activities, make sure they know the following:
  - If they propose a Camper Club, they will be leading it! Camper Club leaders don't need to be experts in their subject, just willing to lead their activity.
  - They can lead their Camper Club with another camper.
  - They will have a staff member at their Camper Club to support them.
  - Each Camper Club will be one hour, and they will have 45 minutes to plan beforehand. Put this in terms of other activities campers have done for context.
  - Materials and locations available to them.
  - Any activities, materials, and locations that are off-limits for any reason.
2. Allow campers to brainstorm aloud with one another and move around the space to do so. It's a collaborative process! Staff should support brainstorming and engagement.

### Questions to encourage brainstorming

- What other camp activities have you liked so far? Why did you like them?
- Is there something you already did at camp that you want to try doing in a different way?
- Is there something you want to do at camp that you haven't done yet?
- Is there something you've done during camp that you felt you didn't have enough time for?

### Creating Camper Club proposals (10 min)

1. Make pencils and copies of the Camper Club Proposals template available. Have anyone interested in leading a Camper Club complete a proposal that includes their name, a title and brief description of their Camper Club, and a preferred location if they have one.

2. Have aspiring Camper Club leaders find a staff sponsor to sign their proposal. The staff sponsor plays a quality assurance role, and their signature means that the proposed activity is safe and feasible for camp.

3. Allow campers to create additional proposals depending on the number you see being filled out. If you allow multiple proposals, remind campers that each Camper Club they lead is one less they'll be able to participate in.

For larger groups, consider limiting campers to one proposal each or requiring Camper Clubs to be co-led in order to maximize leadership opportunities for those interested.

### Real Camper Club examples

- Mushroom Clan: Campers explore with fungus field guides
- Creek Play: Campers wade, swim, and look for critters in the creek
- Quiet Time: Rest time in the dorm
- Making tea: Collecting wild edibles and making tea over an open fire
- Building Forts: Building natural forts in a favorite location
- Tag Games: Campers teach and play different tag games

### Proposing Camper Clubs (15 min)

1. Before campers share their ideas...

- ...remind them to be respectful of everyone and their ideas. It takes a lot of courage to present an original idea with a big group of your peers!
- ...let them know that it's okay if multiple people propose the same activity. We'll talk more about what to do if that happens soon.

2. Have all aspiring Camper Club leaders read their proposal to the rest of camp and tape it to the chalkboard.

3. If you haven't already, let campers know that we may not have space for every idea in the Camper Club schedule. Our next step is to find out which activities our fellow campers are most excited about, and that will help us make a final schedule of our Camper Clubs.

4. Have all campers add their initials to the proposals for Camper Clubs they're interested in attending. Campers can initial as many proposals as they want. Frontload that this isn't a popularity contest, but instead about personal interest.

## Combining ideas

(10 min)

1. Tell campers that, because we want to enable as many Camper Clubs as possible, we are going to see if there are any similar proposals that we can combine. If time permits, have campers suggest ways to maximize the amount of activities instead.
2. Have campers with similar proposals combine their Camper Clubs. If they ask, one camper can choose to turn leadership over to the other instead of being co-leaders.
3. Encourage campers to combine proposals that complement each other as well. For example, "Relaxing by the River" and "Reading" could be combined by allowing campers to bring books to "Relaxing by the River."
4. For each combined Camper Club, have campers write a new proposal and tape their original proposals to it.

### Why initial proposals before combining sessions?

Combining Camper Club activity ideas *after* initialing proposals gives campers the opportunity to modify their ideas based on peer feedback and reduces the amount of time campers are expected to remember the descriptions of proposed activities.

## Explain what's next

(5 min)

1. Tell campers that staff will collect all the proposals and make a final schedule based on the availability of spaces, materials, and staff. Emphasize that, while some Camper Clubs might need to be changed or omitted, staff won't make any changes without talking to the campers who proposed them first.
2. Let campers know when the Camper Club schedule ad signups will be available.
3. Remind campers that they will have time to plan their Camper Clubs and tell them when that will be. Let campers know how those not leading Camper Clubs will spend planning time. This may be free time or another planned activity. Campers not leading activities may have the option of assisting Camper Club leaders in preparing.
4. Remind campers of when Camper Clubs will take place.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

### Schedule and signups

*(var.)*

1. Before creating the Camper Club schedule, check to see if any sessions still need to or can be combined. Approach any campers with proposals you plan to combine.
  - a) Be prepared to support campers in working together. Discomfort problem-solving with peers might be the reason they didn't approach each other in the first place.
  - b) Take a backseat role as campers broker a solution to combining their sessions.
2. Complete the Camper Club Schedule template with the proposals that had the highest interest and fit best into the schedule. Add additional rows as necessary. The number of Camper Clubs will depend on group size and staff availability.
  - a) If any proposed Camper Clubs can't be scheduled due to low interest or logistic hurdles, let those campers know. Remind them that they had a great idea and their Camper Club not being in the schedule isn't any sort of judgment on them.
3. Create a Camper Club Signups page for each activity.
4. Post signup sheets and have campers sign up for one Camper Club per session block.
  - a) Make sure all campers whose Camper Club proposals didn't make it on the schedule have been made aware before the schedule and signups are shared with the whole camp.
  - b) Remind Camper Club leaders that they can't sign up for another Camper Club during the same time as theirs.

### Preparing for Camper Clubs

*(45 min)*

1. Be sure to have a plan for campers not leading Camper Clubs who will not need to plan during this time.
2. Have all Camper Club leaders complete the Camper Club Leader Planning template. Be sure to have Camper Club schedules available for leaders to reference and staff available to answer questions.
3. If possible, allow Camper Club leaders to collect their materials during this time. Otherwise, staff should be prepared to gather materials for them.

## CAMPER CLUB ACTIVITIES

### Getting started

(10 min)

1. This process should reflect how other camp activities begin, but expect Camper Club leaders to take a little more time to get going. Before breaking into groups and releasing the campers:
  - Give staff sponsors copies of the Debrief Questions template. Remind them to conduct the debrief right after the second Camper Club block.
  - Give Camper Club leaders their list of campers.
  - Tell Camper Club leaders where to return at the end of their activity.
  - Remind all campers to be respectful and supportive of one another during Camper Clubs. There will be a staff member at each Camper Club to support everyone.
4. Once Camper Club leaders have their campers, staff sponsor, and materials, they can gather their group and begin their activity!

### Activity time

(2 hrs, 15min)

1. Campers lead and participate in their first Camper Club! After the first one-hour block, campers return to the meeting place for a short break before their second activity.
2. Campers take a 15 min break to prepare for their next activity.
3. Campers do their second Camper Club block. Remind staff sponsors to conduct the debrief after the second block.

### Debrief

(30 min)

1. In small groups, have campers share how they felt about Camper Clubs. Tell campers to focus on the entire experience of proposing, planning, and doing Camper Clubs and not on the quality of individual Camper Clubs. The Debrief Questions template has some questions to get you started.
2. At the end of the debrief, encourage campers to share things they enjoyed about the Camper Clubs they attended with their Camper Club leaders. Encourage Camper Club leaders to seek out and thank members of their Camper Clubs for positive parts of their own experience.

# SEL COMPETENCIES SUPPORTED BY CAMPER CLUB METHOD

Core competence areas and selected examples are taken directly from the CASEL Framework (CASEL, 2020).

	<i>Brainstorming and creating proposals</i>	<i>Sharing proposals with the group</i>	<i>Initialing and combining proposals</i>	<i>Signing up for Camper Clubs</i>	<i>Planning for Camper Clubs</i>	<i>Camper Club activities</i>	<i>Debriefing Camper Clubs</i>
<b>Self-awareness</b>							
Demonstrating honesty and integrity							
Developing interests and a sense of purpose	●		●	●	●	●	●
Experiencing self-efficacy							
Having a growth mindset	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets							
Identifying one's emotions	●		●				●
Integrating personal and social identities							
Linking feelings, values, and thoughts	●			●			●
<b>Self-management</b>							
Demonstrating personal and collective agency							
Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation	●	●	●		●	●	
Identifying and using stress management skills							
Managing one's emotions		●	●			●	●
Setting personal and collective goals							
Showing the courage to take initiative	●	●					
Using planning and organizational skills		●			●	●	
<b>Social awareness</b>							
Demonstrating empathy and compassion							
Recognizing situational demands and opportunities		●	●	●	●	●	●
Recognizing strengths in others							
Showing concerns for the feelings of others		●	●		●	●	●
Taking others' perspectives							
Understanding and expressing gratitude			●				●
<b>Relationship skills</b>							
Communicating effectively							
Developing positive relationships			●			●	●
Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving							
Seeking or offering support and help when needed			●			●	
Showing leadership in groups							
<b>Responsible decision making</b>							
Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness							
Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts			●				●
Identifying solutions for personal and social problems							
Learning how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts			●	●			
Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being				●	●	●	●

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Camper Clubs:** Camp activities proposed, planned, and led by campers using an adapted open space technology model

**Camper Clubs facilitator:** The camp staff member spearheading instruction and organization during the Camper Club process

**Camper Club leaders:** Campers who propose sessions and, later, the campers who plan and facilitate Camper Clubs

**CASEL 5:** Five interrelated areas of social and emotional competence developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

**Open space technology (OST):** A collaborative method of group organization with West African roots that relies on participant-driven planning to create and schedule events surrounding a central idea or theme

**Responsible decision-making:** The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations<sup>1</sup>

**Relationship skills:** The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations<sup>1</sup>

**Self-awareness:** The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts<sup>1</sup>

**Self-management:** The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations<sup>1</sup>

**Social and emotional learning (SEL):** The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions<sup>1</sup>

**Social awareness:** The abilities to understand the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts<sup>1</sup>

**Staff sponsor:** Camp staff who approve sessions proposed by campers, attend Camper Clubs as behavior management and safety support, and lead the final debrief

<sup>1</sup>Definition from Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2020).

# CAMPER CLUB STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

The Camper Clubs facilitator is the staff member spearheading instruction and organization throughout the Camper Club process. This may include directing the process of brainstorming and proposing activities and creating the finished Camper Club activity schedule.

Staff sponsors provide necessary support to campers throughout the process. Below are several considerations for supporting campers during various steps.

## Brainstorming

- Help campers brainstorm and promote engagement.

## Creating Camper Club proposals

- Sign off on proposals that are safe and feasible within the time frame. If in doubt, ask the facilitator

## Combining Camper Club ideas

- Guide campers toward potential fits for collaboration as needed
- Support campers in brokering solutions toward the combination and modification of their activities.

## Schedule and signups

- Answer questions about Camper Clubs and redirect questions to Camper Club leaders as needed.
- Support facilitator with scheduling as needed. This may involve talking to potential Camper Club leaders about necessary modifications to their activities. Staff should support campers through potentially tough conversations about the outcome of their proposal.

## Preparing for Camper Clubs

- Answer questions about materials, logistics, etc. for Camper Club leaders as they plan
- Gather materials for Camper Club leaders as needed.
- Staff may also be spending this time staffing a separate activity for campers not leading Camper Clubs.

## Before and during Camper Clubs

- Remind the Camper Club leader you'll be with of your support role. Ask if there is anything else they want you to know ahead of time about what they need.
- Support Camper Club leader in gathering participants and departing from the meeting spot.
- Ensure safety and behavior management and otherwise support your Camper Club leader throughout their activity session.
- Help facilitate transition from one Camper Club activity to another.

## Debrief

- Conduct Camper Club debrief.

# CAMPER CLUB PROPOSAL

Name of Camper Club: \_\_\_\_\_

Camper Club leader (you!): \_\_\_\_\_

What happens during this Camper Club? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where does this Camper Club take place? Can it happen anywhere?

\_\_\_\_\_

Staff sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_

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# CAMPER CLUB PROPOSAL

Name of Camper Club: \_\_\_\_\_

Camper Club leader (you!): \_\_\_\_\_

What happens during this Camper Club? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where does this Camper Club take place? Can it happen anywhere?

\_\_\_\_\_

Staff sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_

# CAMPER CLUB LEADER PLANNING

Name of Camper Club: \_\_\_\_\_

Camper Club leader(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Staff sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_

Location(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Start time: \_\_\_\_\_ End time: \_\_\_\_\_

What happens during this Camper Club? A numbered list might help.

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What materials will you need?

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# CAMPER CLUB SCHEDULE

	Camper Club name	Leader(s)	Staff sponsor	Location(s)
<b>First session (1 hr)</b>  Start time:  End time:				
<b>Break (15 min)</b>				
<b>Second session (1 hr)</b>  Start time:  End time:				
<b>Debrief (30 min)</b>				

# DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

The purpose of the debrief is for campers and staff to reflect on the entire experience of Camper Clubs from brainstorming proposals to the Camper Clubs themselves. Provide a space for campers to deal with tough emotions, like not having anyone sign up for their activity, and to help them understand the value of their ideas even if other ideas were chosen.

Below are a few discussion questions to help campers and staff debrief Camper Clubs. Use some or all of the questions and a variety of discussion routines to encourage engagement.

1. What was your favorite part of Camper Clubs?
  2. Was there anything challenging about the role you took on during Camper Clubs, whether it was leading one, participating in one, helping a friend prepare for one, or something else? How did you feel about it?
  3. What do you think would make Camper Clubs better?
  4. How do you feel about the whole experience? What did you learn?
  5. Why do you think we did Camper Clubs?
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