Research Guide (Grades PreK–6)
College and Career Competency: *Self-Awareness*

Definition:

Self-awareness is the capacity to become the object of one's own attention (Duval & Wicklund, 1972, as cited in Morin, 2011). Self-awareness is a "self-perceptive state emerging from self-observation" (Cassidy, 2011, p. 992). In short, self-awareness can be defined as reflecting on experiences to understand your strengths, interests, and challenges and then using that knowledge about yourself (Gaumer Erickson & Noonan, 2016a).

Essential Components for Students:

1. Engage in self-assessment, self-observation, and reflection (on your experiences) and be open to the input of others.
2. Apply your understanding of your strengths, interests, and challenges (Gaumer Erickson & Noonan, 2016b).

Competency Sequence for Students:

These targets describe how students demonstrate competency knowledge (Noonan & Gaumer Erickson, 2018). These targets can be used to determine students' growth over time.

	Self-Awareness
Beginning	• Recognizes and identifies feeling words linked to various situations. • Communicates personal likes and dislikes. • Makes choices based on personal preferences.
Emerging	• Describes personal strengths and preferences. • Identifies words that describe basic personal emotions. • Demonstrates mindfulness for short periods. • Uses self-knowledge of preferences to inform decisions when opportunities arise.
Proficient	• Demonstrates ability to reflect on experiences and identifies personal strengths. • Describes personal feelings related to specific situations. • Describes own emotions with more expansive vocabulary and depth.

Research:

- Researchers regard self-awareness and self-concept as critical to social and emotional development and learning (Durlak et al., 2011; Marsh et al., 2002). Early childhood is a crucial period for forming a positive self-concept that will endure into adulthood. For this reason, to gain a better understanding of how children develop their self-concept, it is important to measure it at a young age (Marsh et al., 2002). Additional details are provided in the **Assessments** section below.
- Rochat (2003, 2021) describes five levels of self-awareness that develop chronologically from infancy to 4–5 years of age. Infants express self-awareness by recognizing objects in a mirror. Around 2 years of age, children develop an awareness that they are part of a social world and have the attention of others (Lewis, 2022). At this age, self-awareness is demonstrated through

self-conscious emotions, such as embarrassment, empathy, and jealousy. By 3 years old, children become increasingly attuned to social norms (Rochat, 2021). At 4–5 years old, children are aware of how others perceive and value them, which can manifest itself in either pride or shame (Rochat, 2003, 2021).

- In studies with preschoolers, experimental groups who were made self-aware were 37% (Bender et al., 2018) and 22% (Ding et al., 2019) more likely to tell the truth than control groups about having committed a minor transgression.

- Children's ability to compare themselves accurately with others increases from kindergarten to fourth grade (Jacobs et al., 2003). Kindergarteners tend to compare themselves with peers based on appearance and behavior. In early to middle childhood (ages 5–8), children tend to describe themselves in sets of competencies (e.g., good at various playground skills) rather than a single trait (e.g., being athletic). Children at this age also notice opposites but in an all-or-nothing way (i.e., either good or bad, nice or mean, etc.). Their self-representations are usually positive but inaccurate. Teachers can help children develop more balanced and accurate self-descriptions by encouraging reflection and providing feedback.

- School brings the chance for children to figure out self-care, common rules, social norms, names for emotions and appropriate ways to express them, teamwork, privacy, personal boundaries, and time management (Kortesoja, 2022). Thus, children start becoming aware of patterns in their thinking and ways to change them.

- Promoting self-awareness can help students manage maladaptive perfectionism (Owen, 2020). Teachers can ask students to think of their performance from others' points of view and to remember that mistakes and risks are part of learning. An important component of self-awareness is optimistic thinking, which allows one to confidently respond to difficulties and believe in one's own abilities (Jacquez et al., 2020).

- Mindfulness training has been successfully incorporated into elementary and high school classrooms (Napoli et al., 2005). Within the elementary school, the training took the form of 12 45-minute sessions held bimonthly during regular first-, second-, and third-grade PE classes. The sessions were conducted by a facilitator who was a mindfulness training instructor (Napoli et al., 2005). The results showed a statistically significant increase in selective attention (the ability to choose what to pay attention to) and a reduction of both students' test anxiety and teachers' ratings of students' ADHD behaviors. The researchers suggest that "incorporating mindfulness training into the physical education curriculum as health education is an ideal way to begin teaching children at an early age how to deal with stress and anxiety and focus and pay attention" (Napoli et al., 2005, p. 113).

- A mindfulness-based social-emotional learning program was successfully tested with third graders (Bakosh et al., 2016). The program consisted of 10-minute audio tracks played daily (and repeated) over 8 weeks. During the last 2 minutes of the recordings, students engaged in a journaling activity. The program had a positive impact on reading grades and classroom behavior.

- Students who have high levels of self-awareness, including self-advocacy, are predicted to have more access to community resources a year after high school, including reliable transportation, financial independence, independent living, and life satisfaction (Davis et al., 2023).

Assessments:

- [The College & Career Competency Framework](#) includes assessments designed to increase students' self-awareness related to the following constructs:
  - Assertiveness

- o Conflict Management
- o Empathy
- o Goal setting
- o Networking
- o Self-efficacy
- o Self-regulation

Teachers can access the assessments by setting up a free account on https://www.cccstudent.org/ and following the instructions. Results of assessments are immediately available for reflection. Students (and teachers) can use individual results to identify behaviors to focus on cultivating or strengthening.

- The Self-Description Questionnaire for Preschoolers (SDQP; Marsh et al., 1991, 2002) was tested with 100 preschool children who ranged in age from 4 to 6. The SDQP measures academic self-concept in verbal and mathematical areas as well as self-concept related to physical ability, appearance, peer relations, and parent relations. The items are read to the children individually as questions (see sample items below). The researchers found that the instrument could be used successfully with young children and that general self-concept was well-defined at the ages covered in the study.
  - o Physical ability (6 items): Can you run fast?
  - o Appearance (6 items): Do you like the way you look?
  - o Peer relations (6 items): Do you have a lot of friends?
  - o Parent relations (8 items): Do you like your parents?
  - o Verbal (6 items): Do you enjoy listening to stories?
  - o Math (6 items): Do you like saying numbers?
- The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Acceptance for Young Children (Harter & Pike, 1983, 1984, as cited in Butler & Gasson, 2005) was developed to address the fact that a questionnaire format does not always work well with very young children. Instead, children are shown two pictures and asked to identify which picture is more like them (e.g., a smiling girl and a frowning girl). There are four sets of Pictorial Plates: Preschool/Kindergarten for Girls, Preschool/Kindergarten for Boys, 1st/2nd Grades for Girls, and 1st/2nd Grades for Boys. For examples of the pictures, see can be found at Harter (n.d.). There are two versions of this assessment, one for children younger than 5 and one for children ages 5–7. Topics in the assessment include cognitive and physical competence, peer acceptance, and maternal acceptance (Harter & Pike, 1984).
- The Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (Piers, 1969, 1984, 1996; Piers & Harris, 1969; Piers & Herzberg, 2002) is intended for use with children ages 7–18. This instrument uses a self-report format consisting of 60 items with simple yes and no answers and takes 10–15 minutes to administer (Butler & Gasson, 2005). For more information, see Piers et al. (2018).
  Areas measured are:
  - o Popularity
  - o Physical appearance and attributes
  - o Freedom from anxiety
  - o Intellectual and school status
  - o Behavioral adjustment
  - o Happiness and satisfaction

Instructional Practices:

- The College & Career Competency Framework includes lesson sets designed to build students' self-awareness:
  - *Teaching Assertiveness in Middle and High School Classrooms* (Noonan et al., 2022)
  - *Teaching Conflict Management in Middle and High School Classrooms* (Noonan et al., 2017)
  - *Teaching Self-Efficacy in Middle and High School Classrooms* (Gaumer Erickson et al., 2020a)
  - *Teaching Self-Regulation in Middle and High School Classrooms* (Gaumer Erickson et al., 2020b)

  Each set outlines more than 25 instructional activities across eight lessons. The lessons include explicit instruction and application elements that teachers can modify based on students' experiences and needs. The lessons, accompanied by a PDF student workbook with worksheets that can be reproduced to facilitate learning, are available for purchase at https://www.cccframework.org/competency-lessons-and-student-workbooks/.

- The Michigan State University Extension (Moyses, 2013) provides several strategies to help young children identify emotions.
  - **Name the feeling:** Help children give their feelings labels. When they make statements that don't directly express feelings, help them expand to specifically label the underlying feelings. "Your friend won't share a toy with you; you are sad. You said you want to be able to play with the toy, too." If necessary, explain the feeling using easy words that they can understand. Helping young children name their feelings allows them to develop an emotional vocabulary for better understanding and expressing themselves. Praise children when they talk about their feelings. Consider using resources such as feeling charts and emotion faces.
  - **Identify feelings in themselves and others:** Talk with children about feelings they have and those that they see in others. "I hear you laughing. Are you happy?" Or "She fell down. How do you think she feels?" Using picture books can be an effective way to illustrate feelings.
  - **Talk about how feelings can be expressed:** Lead by example. Teach children different ways to deal with feelings. Talk about your own feelings and ways you express those feelings. What do you do when you get mad? How do people know you are happy? Talk about ways that children can express their emotions and encourage them to come up with their own options for how to deal with their feelings. If some options aren't appropriate, talk with them about why those options aren't appropriate.

- Parenting Guides (NBC Universal, n.d.) provide tips for building children's self-awareness by grade level (pre-K–12). To access tips for a specific grade level, use the search term "self-awareness" and click on the desired grade level. For example, the tips for first graders include drawing a poster with a child using faces that convey different emotions, then discussing what emotion is seen on the face and when the child last had that emotion.

- The Public Broadcasting Service (n.d.) provides advice on helping children develop emotional self-awareness. Parents and teachers can browse by age and find activities and books that help children understand and manage emotions. To access activities for specific grade levels, start on the Social & Emotional Activity Finder page, click on the relevant age, select **Emotions & Self-Awareness** in the drop-down, and then select **Self-Awareness**. For example, to help 5-year-olds begin building self-awareness, suggested activities include:
  - Using the popular children's television show *Arthur* to help children manage emotions

- o Watching and discussing a *Sesame Street* episode about overcoming fears
  - o Reading aloud
- *I'm Determined* (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.) provides many lesson plans to support students' development of self-awareness as well as other areas of self-determination. The lesson plans include standards of learning, objectives, prerequisites, materials needed, timeframe, lesson procedure, evaluation, extending understanding, and student handouts. See an example of a lesson plan for elementary school students on self-awareness and self-knowledge.
- *Teaching Self-Awareness to Pre-Schoolers* (Cook, 2016) includes activities like Same or Different, where the teacher can help students identify similarities or differences in what the children are wearing (i.e., everyone is wearing shoes, but some people are wearing sneakers, some have sandals, etc.). To conclude the activity, the teacher explains that it's OK to be different from each other and that having differences is what makes the class a fun place to be. The lesson includes a variety of other activities designed to:
  - o help students see how everyone has similarities and differences,
  - o teach students that when they do good things, they feel good about themselves,
  - o demonstrate appropriate ways to control their own behavior and reactions, and
  - o model appropriate responses to difficult situations.

  A preview of the lesson is available. This full lesson and other similar lessons are available via a membership on Study.com (30-day money-back guarantee).
- Mindfulness, which is the inclination to be aware in the moment without judging or thinking about outcomes (Napoli et al., 2005), can lead to enhanced self-awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003).
  - o A Mindfulness-Based Kindness Curriculum for Preschoolers (Center for Healthy Minds, n.d.) was originally created for a research project examining the impact of mindfulness-based practices on preschool well-being (Flook et al., 2010). The Kindness Curriculum lessons are sequential and include activities, books, songs, and movement. The curriculum is free by signing up.
- *5 Ways to Help Your Grade-Schooler Gain Self-Awareness* (Patino, n.d.) discusses the importance of self-awareness for children. The article offers several tips for helping young children build their self-awareness, such as encouraging them to talk about their strengths and weaknesses, helping them look at the big picture, not viewing weaknesses as a bad thing, nurturing their passions, and encouraging them to try new things. There are also self-awareness worksheets for children.

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