Developed in collaboration with

Responsible Decision-Making

Competency

The educator will develop their ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Key Method

The educator will develop and strengthen their ability to make responsible decisions by creating a plan that includes self-reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, and small action steps.

Method Components

What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):

"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." (CASEL, 2023)

CASEL's framework for SEL addresses five broad and interrelated areas of social and emotional competence:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- **Responsible decision-making**

In this micro-credential, you will explore aspects of **responsible decision-making**, reflect on how this competency is relevant to your work and personal life, and develop a plan for personal growth.

What is Responsible Decision-Making?

Responsible decision-making involves making positive and informed choices. This includes considering the consequences of our actions, being curious and open-minded to new perspectives and information, and identifying solutions that benefit us and the community (CASEL, 2023).

Consider three significant ways you likely rely on this competency: problem analysis, identifying solutions, and reflection on a decision's impact for a more in-depth look at responsible decision-making and how it impacts you personally and professionally.

Problem Analysis

Responsible decision-making begins with analyzing a question or problem. This is the information-gathering stage, where a skilled decision-maker activates curiosity and opens their mind to new knowledge and different viewpoints. Decision-making includes critically examining surface-level assumptions to discover the root cause of a problem.

Educators make so many daily decisions that many of us use unconscious mental shortcuts to cope with difficult decisions. These "decision traps" are hardwired so deeply into our thinking process that we often fail to recognize them. Being aware of these traps is the first step to avoiding them.

Some of the most common traps are:

- **Anchoring**
  We get stuck on first impressions. This means that we may get set on a decision based solely on initial impressions and fail to learn more and investigate an issue more deeply.
- **Maintaining the Status Quo**
  We may be uncomfortable challenging the "way things are." It is easier to make decisions that won't upset the current balance of power, ways of

thinking, and policies and practices we are accustomed to. However, this trap may hinder the necessary innovation for improvement.

- **Sticking With a Bad Decision**
  Often, we find it difficult to admit to a bad decision and acknowledge we made a mistake. This trap robs us of the ability to learn from our mistakes and adapt our plans accordingly.
- **Not Framing the Question Properly**
  The way we frame a problem can affect how we approach a solution. Considering a range of perspectives and reframing the question in various ways can help us make a more balanced decision.

Analyzing a problem requires a clear head, and it is essential to recognize when we are not in the right state of mind to make a responsible decision. The **H.A.L.T. method** for decision-making reminds us to pause for self-awareness before making a decision.

H.A.L.T. stands for:

H: Your mind does not process as effectively when you are **hungry**.

A: Your mind is irrational and reactive when you are **angry**.

L: You are more vulnerable to poor decisions when you are **lonely**.

T: Being **tired** prevents you from thinking or working well.

Consider whether these factors affect you, and attend to your needs before returning to the problem.

When you are ready to examine a problem with a fresh perspective, take some time to investigate. Talk to others impacted by the situation and ask open-ended questions to learn about their experiences and ideas. Try to seek out people who are likely to see the problem differently from you, who may be able to help you reframe the question or understand it more deeply.

Try the **"5 Whys"** strategy to get to the root cause of a problem:

⇒ Why did the problem happen?

⇒ Why did *that* (your response to the first question) happen?

⇒ But why did *that* happen?

⇒ And why did *that* happen?

⇒ Still, why did *that* happen?

Each response to a “why” question gets you closer to the root cause of a problem. It may take more or fewer than five whys to reach a cause that could be altered to prevent the problem in the future.

Identifying Solutions

Once you have clearly understood a question or problem, the next step is to identify possible solutions. This is often a good time to collaborate with others who can help you think creatively and generate multiple solutions.

Working with others, especially those impacted by the problem and/or historically underrepresented in decision-making, offers you a better understanding of the potential outcomes of each solution. A diverse group of advisors can help you foresee unintended consequences or obstacles to success.

For example, imagine you are considering options to improve students' homework completion rates. Brainstorming and discussing solutions with colleagues, your supervisor, students, and even a few friends who are not educators will produce more varied solutions that you can compare and experiment with. These conversations will also help you understand how others view your decisions. Knowing ahead of time that a certain homework policy would put the teacher down the hall in a problematic situation, understanding the factors that make your students feel overwhelmed or supported, or hearing how your friend approaches deadlines at work could give you the context you need to make the best choice.

Here are a few decision-making acronyms you may find useful:

S.O.D.A.S.

Situation - Identify the situation and determine who, what, when, where, and why.
Options - Make a list of all the options you can think of.
Disadvantages - Determine the disadvantages for each option on the list.
Advantages - Determine the advantages of each option on the list.
Solution - Review all the information to determine a solution and follow through.

P.O.O.C.H.

Problem - Identify the problem.
Options - Brainstorm options.
Outcomes - List all the possible outcomes—both pros and cons.
Choose - Choose an option based on the information.
How did it go? - Evaluate the effectiveness of the decision.

Decision Tree

Examine the possible choices and their probable outcomes using a flowchart. Templates and examples are provided in the RESOURCE section.

Reflection on Impact

This stage of responsible decision-making should occur before and after the decision is made and acted upon. We anticipate how our decisions are likely to impact ourselves and others, and follow up later as we observe their outcomes.

The “responsible” part of decision-making is more than just taking a methodical approach. It is our responsibility to promote our well-being and that of our family and community. When making decisions, we anticipate potential personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts and use data (quantitative or qualitative) to evaluate how well it went.

For example, let’s return to the scenario where you adjust homework practices. After choosing an option, you track progress toward your goal (more homework turned in on time) by looking at the numbers. Are rates improving? But look a level deeper: what other impacts has your decision had? Are students producing high-quality work? Are they doing better on assessments of their learning? How do they say they have been impacted by the changes you made? Have the changes impacted you in any unexpected ways?

You may find a flaw in your decision and decide to change it. You may realize you left out an important stakeholder group in your decision-making process and commit to including them going forward. Or, you might see great success and share your experience with others, leading to a systems-wide change. Whatever the outcome, reflecting on your own and with others is key to helping you learn from experience and grow in this competence area over time.

Supporting Rationale and Research

Caldwell, Cam and Anderson, Verl (2021) "Moral Identity, Self-Improvement, and the Quest for Greatness: A Leadership Responsibility," The Journal of Values-Based Leadership: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 4. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.22543/0733.142.1359

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Resources

General SEL Resources

CASEL

- What is the CASEL Framework? | CASEL

Leadership Competencies | NEA

Here Are the '5 Whys' to Solving Problems

Responsible Decision-Making Growth Plan

How to Write a SMART Goal

Setting SMART Goals as A Teacher

1,500 Decisions a Day (At Least!): How Teachers Cope with a Dizzying Array of Questions | Alyson Klein | Edweek

Decision Chain | Decision Education Foundation

- Decision Traps | video from Decision Education Foundation

Analyzing Problems and Solutions Templates

20 Free Decision Tree Templates | Word Templates Online

Decision Trees | Canva

Decision-Making Worksheet for Adults | Positive Psychology

Reflecting on Impact
Iterative & Critical Reflection on Teaching

Responsible Decision-Making Growth Plan

How to Write a SMART Goal

Setting SMART Goals as A Teacher

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and receive a proficient score for all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

(200-300 words)
Please answer the following contextual questions to help our assessors understand your instructional situation. Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

1. Describe your current educational role and environment.
2. How do you currently approach responsible decision-making in BOTH your professional and personal life? Provide specific examples.
3. How do you model open-mindedness and curiosity in decision-making for your students and/or colleagues? Provide specific examples.

4. Why did you choose this micro-credential, and what do you hope to gain? Provide specific examples.

Passing: All questions are answered thoroughly. The responses provide enough information to justify choosing this micro-credential to address a specific need. Responses explain current thoughts on problem analysis, solution identification, and the impact of decision-making. Specific examples are included in the responses.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following three artifacts to prove your learning. *Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

Artifact 1: Reflecting on Your Decision-making

Please consider each statement and how easy or difficult it is for you. **You will not turn in this table.**

Responsible Decision-Making		Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy
PROBLEM ANALYSIS	I gather relevant information to explore the root causes of problems.				
	I recognize the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in my school community.				
	I involve others who are impacted* to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project.				
IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS	I involve others who are impacted* to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems.				
	I find practical and respectful ways to overcome difficulty, even when it comes to making decisions that may not be popular.				
	I consider how my choices will be viewed through the lens of the young people I serve and the community around them.				
REFLECTION ON IMPACT	I take time for self-reflection and group reflection on progress toward goals and the process used.				
	I consider how my personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others.				
	I help to make my personal and professional community a better place.				

* such as staff and colleagues, young people, their families, and other community members – especially those who are historically underrepresented in decision-making.

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(400-800 words)
Your responses to the items above are for you alone, but take some time to reflect by responding to the following prompts.

1. **Strengths and Interactions:** How do the areas you marked as "easy" or "very easy" enhance your interactions with students, peers, and others? Provide specific examples from your life where these strengths have contributed to creating a supportive, respectful, or innovative environment.
2. **Challenges and Growth Opportunities:** For areas marked as "difficult" or "very difficult," how could addressing these challenges improve your decision-making skills? Provide specific examples.
3. **Surprises and Confirmations:** As you reflect on your responses, were there things that surprised you? Were there things that confirmed what you already know about yourself? Provide specific examples.

4. **Outcomes of Your Decision-Making:** Share a specific example from your life where strong decision-making skills helped solve a problem or achieve a positive result. Share another specific example from your life where a lack of strong decision-making skills caused harm.
5. **Commitment to Growth:** Based on your reflections, what actions will you take to build on your strengths **and** address your challenges with responsible decision-making? Provide specific examples.

Turn in your responses to these five prompts. You may turn this in via the following formats:

*Photo of your handwritten response (must be legible)
*Voice recording
*Digital document

Artifact 2: Explore an Area of Personal Growth

(700-1000 words)
Choose a real-life situation in which you are struggling to make a decision. Use one of the resources or reading section tools to analyze the problem, generate solutions, and choose the best course of action. Document your process and reflections. Address all of the following prompts in your response:

- Describe the situation that you've chosen to address. Identify the problem.
- What tool did you use and why did you choose it?
- What were some possible solutions you thought of?
- What were the likely consequences of each of these options?
- What was most important for you to consider when making this decision?
- What was your final decision? Explain why.
- What was the outcome of your decision? Was it the right decision? Why or why not?

Submit the completed tool and your response to these questions.

Artifact 3: Responsible Decision-Making Growth Plan

(200-400 words)
Write in a journal or use a digital format to create a responsible decision-making plan to improve **your** decision-making skills. In your writing, please:

1. Include one goal, written in a SMART goal format (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). Address each SMART element as you create your goal. See RESOURCES. Be sure to write a goal that addresses **your** decision-making skills.

2. Describe any anticipated challenges to reaching your goal. How will you address those challenges?
3. Describe any supportive people you can rely on or routines and structures you can implement to help you achieve your goal.
4. List at least three specific steps you will take to get started.
5. Explain how you will track your progress. Start with the beginning status of your goal, then describe how you will track your progress as the plan is implemented. This may include a specific tracking tool, data that you keep, or journal entries that monitor your progress. What will you do if you discover something isn't working as planned?

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	**Basic**	**Developing**
Artifact 1: Reflecting on Your Responsible Decision-Making	All questions are fully answered with complete explanations and specific examples. Introspection is evident. Responses are clear and well-organized, and the submission is legible and understandable.	Prompts are answered, but examples are vague or missing. Limited introspection or analysis is evident in responses.	Not all reflection prompts are answered. Responses lack detail, introspection, or alignment with the activity's goals.
Artifact 2: Explore an Area of Personal Growth	All prompts are addressed with clear, detailed, and thoughtful responses. The selected tool is appropriate for the decision-making situation and is applied effectively. The consequences of decisions are analyzed comprehensively, and the final decision is justified with sound reasoning.	Most prompts are addressed, but responses lack detail or depth. The selected tool is applied but not fully aligned with the decision-making situation. The consequences of decisions are considered but lack thorough analysis.	Few prompts are addressed, and responses are superficial or incomplete. The selected tool is inappropriate or not applied effectively. The consequences of decisions are not analyzed, and the final decision lacks justification. The completed tool or writing is missing major elements or is not submitted.

	The completed tool and writing are submitted and demonstrate authenticity and depth.	The completed tool or writing is missing minor elements or lacks clarity.	
Artifact 3: Responsible Decision-making Growth Plan	The plan includes a clear SMART goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Each of these elements is explained. The goal focuses on improvement for the **educator's** decision-making skills. Anticipated challenges are identified with thoughtful strategies to address them. Support systems and routines are described in detail, demonstrating alignment with the goal. At least three specific, actionable steps are provided with a clear timeline for tracking progress, and strategies	The plan includes a goal, but it does not fully align with SMART criteria. Challenges and strategies are identified but lack depth or feasibility. Fewer than three action steps are included or are not specific or actionable. The plan reflects limited introspection or intentionality.	The plan lacks a clear or relevant goal. Challenges and strategies are missing or not realistic. Action steps are missing, vague, or incomplete. The plan does not reflect introspection or alignment with responsible decision-making principles.

	for adjustments, as needed. The plan reflects introspection, intentionality, and alignment with responsible decision-making principles.		

Part 3 Reflection

(200-400 words)
Write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. A strong reflection describes:

- your personal experiences working toward understanding and application of the concepts in this micro-credential,
- specific moments that supported your learning,
- examples of how you will apply your learning to your unique context.

For tips on writing a good reflection, review the following resource:
How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?

Include your responses to the following questions in your submission:

1. How did implementing your growth plan strengthen your decision-making?
2. What are your next steps in strengthening your decision-making?
3. What will you do differently, or what is working well for you?

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

Passing: Reflection provides evidence that this activity has positively impacted your decision-making. Specific examples are cited directly from personal or work-related experiences to support claims. Also included are specific, actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.