

Elementary Research Guide (Grades Pre-K – 5)

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, 2016).

Essential Components for Students:

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

Competency Sequence for Students:

These targets describe how students demonstrate competency knowledge at each grade cluster (Noonan & Gaumer Erickson, 2018). By the end of each grade cluster, each student should be able to:

Self-Awareness	
Pre-K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and identify feeling words linked to various situations. • Communicate personal likes and dislikes. • Make choices based on personal preferences.
K-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe personal strengths and preferences. • Identify words that describe basic personal emotions. • Demonstrate mindfulness for short periods. • Use self-knowledge of preferences to inform decisions when opportunities arise.
3-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate ability to reflect on experiences and identify personal strengths. • Describe personal feelings related to specific situations. • Describe 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, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002). Early childhood is a crucial period for forming a positive self-concept that will endure into adulthood. For this reason, it is important to gain a better understanding of how children develop their self-concept by measuring it at a young age (Marsh et al., 2002). Additional details are provided in the **Assessments** section below.
- Rochat (2003) describes five levels of self-awareness that develop chronologically from Pre-K to 4-5 years of age (kindergarten). 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, 2011). At this age, self-awareness is demonstrated through self-conscious emotions, such as embarrassment, empathy, and jealousy. At 4-5 years

of age, children are aware of how others perceive and value them, which can manifest itself in either pride or shame (Rochat, 2003).

- Children’s ability to compare themselves accurately with others increases from kindergarten to fourth grade (Jacobs, Bleeker, & Constantino, 2003). Kindergarteners tend to compare themselves with peers based on appearance and behavior. In early to middle childhood (ages 5-8), children will 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.). Teachers can help children develop more balanced and accurate self-descriptions by encouraging reflection and providing feedback.
- Mindfulness training has been successfully incorporated into elementary and high school classrooms (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005). Within the elementary school, the training took the form of 12 bi-monthly, 45-minute sessions held during regular 1st, 2nd, and 3rd 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, Snow, Tobias, Houlihan, & Barbosa-Leiker, 2015). The program consisted of 10-minute audio tracks played daily (and repeated) over 8 weeks. During the last two minutes of the recordings students engaged in a journaling activity. The program had a positive impact on reading grades and classroom behavior. Information on the mindfulness-based stress reduction protocol that the program is based on can be found at: <https://www.mindfulnesscds.com/>.

Assessments:

- The Self-Description Questionnaire for Preschoolers (SDQP; Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1991; Marsh et al., 2002) was tested with 100 preschool children who ranged in age from 4 to 6. The SDQP measures academic self-concept in the areas of verbal and math, and self-concept related to physical ability, appearance, peer relations, and parent relations. The items are read to the children individually in the form of a question (see sample items below). The researchers found the instrument could be used successfully with young children, and that general self-concept was well-defined at the ages covered in the study.
 - Physical ability (6 items): Can you run fast?
 - Appearance (6 items): Do you like the way you look?
 - Peer relations (6 items): Do you have a lot of friends?
 - Parent relations (8 items): Do you like your parents?
 - Verbal (6 items): Do you enjoy listening to stories?
 - 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, 1st/2nd Grades for Boys. Examples of

the pictures can be found at <https://portfolio.du.edu/SusanHarter/page/44342> (Harter, n.d.).

There are two versions of this assessment, one for children younger than five, and one for children ages 5-7. Topics included 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 to 15 minutes to administer (Butler & Gasson, 2005). More information, including pricing, can be found at <https://www.wpspublish.com/store/p/2912/piers-harris-2-piers-harris-childrens-self-concept-scale-second-edition> (Piers & Herzberg, 2002).

Areas measured are:

- Popularity
- Physical Appearance and Attributes
- Freedom from Anxiety
- Intellectual and School Status
- Behavioral Adjustment
- Happiness and Satisfaction

Instructional Practices:

- 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 on that and specifically label the underlying feeling. “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 (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/2006/feelingchart.pdf>) and emotion faces (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules-archive/module2/handouts/5.pdf>).
 - **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 a great 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 how 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.
- Parent Toolkit (NBC News Education Nation, n.d.) provides tips for building children’s self-awareness by grade level (Pre-K – 12). To access tips for a specific grade level, start on the Self-Awareness page (<https://www.parenttoolkit.com/explore-your-toolkit?ft=F461A216-5056-9A4B-6CDFC2C7B92D7F2D&langvar>) and use the drop-down menu for grade levels to filter for the desired grade levels. For example, the tips for first-graders include drawing a poster with the child using faces that convey different motions, then discussing what emotion is seen on the face and when the child last had that emotion.

- PBS Parents (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 (<http://www.pbs.org/parents/child-development/activity-finder?topic=8780>), 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
 - Playing an Arthur-inspired “Draw Your Feelings” game (<http://pbskids.org/arthur/health/resilience/draw-your-feelings.html>)
 - Watching and discussing a *Sesame Street* episode about overcoming fears
 - Reading aloud
- *I’m Determined* (Virginia Department of Education, 2012) provides many lesson plans to support students’ development of self-awareness as well as other areas of self-determination (<http://www.imdetermined.org/>). 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: https://www.imdetermined.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/es-selfawarepiecedtogether_copy.pdf.
- Teaching Self-Awareness to Pre-Schoolers (Cook, n.d.) 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:
 - help students see how everyone has similarities and differences,
 - teach students that when they do good things they feel good about themselves,
 - demonstrate appropriate ways to control their own behavior and reactions, and
 - model appropriate responses to difficult situations.
 A preview of the lesson is available at <https://study.com/academy/lesson/teaching-self-awareness-to-preschoolers.html>. 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).
 - A Mindfulness-Based Kindness Curriculum for Preschoolers (Healthy Minds Innovations, Inc., 2017) 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 at <https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/sign-up-to-receive-the-kindness-curriculum>.
- 5 Ways to Help Your Grade-Schooler Gain Self-Awareness (Patino, n.d.) discusses the importance of self-awareness for children. Available at <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/self-awareness/5-ways-to-help-your-grade-schooler-gain-self-awareness>, the article offers several tips for helping young children build their self-awareness, such as encouraging children to talk about their strengths and their 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

available at <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/self-awareness/download-self-awareness-worksheet-for-kids>.

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