



Matt: Hey everybody, this is Matt and Laura, and welcome to The Creatively Connected Classroom. We have a very amazing host, I know we always say that every week, but every time we talk, but Elizabeth Peterson, just can't wait to just jump in and get going with our conversation today.

Laura: Elizabeth's topic for the chat was this idea of connecting SEL and creativity and I know she's done a lot of work on that, and it's very near and dear to our heart as well-

Matt: Oh, absolutely.

Laura: ... because we truly believe in it. Elizabeth, tell us a little bit about your back story, who you are? What you teach? Then we'll jump into SEL and creativity.

Elizabeth P.: Sweet. That sounds great. Well, thank you so much for having me. Love Education Closet and everything that you guys are doing over there. A little bit about me. I have been teaching for about, well, 20 years now. It started out, I was one of those kids that just always knew what they wanted to do, and that was to teach. I knew from when I was in fifth grade.

Laura: Wow. Did you play school? Were you [inaudible 00:01:32] school?

Elizabeth P.: I absolutely did. Stuffed animals, complete with stuffed animals, black board, I would teach the lyrics actually to Shout.

Laura: Nice.

Elizabeth P.: Write those up and teach that to my little stuffed animals. I had a couple of detours there. I wanted to be an auto-mechanic, a mechanical engineer, but I went right back to teaching, because I just absolutely loved kids, I loved hearing their perspective on things, and I just really liked finding different ways to teach my animals, or my ... the kids I would be able to visit when I was in high school, that kind of thing.

Elizabeth P.: When I went into college, I knew I wanted to do elementary ed. And I had to pick a second major, so I picked music, because I just ... I had



been a pianist since I was in second grade. I just wanted to learn as much as I possibly could about it.

Laura: That's [crosstalk 00:02:32].

Elizabeth P.: While no one could understand why I chose that as my second major, because it didn't "fit" with elementary ed. I didn't want to be a performance major. I didn't want to be a music ed. Major, but what that allowed me to do as I was doing my senior class with all the other ed majors, music majors I should say, is it allowed me to research how I can start infiltrating music into my classroom and into my lessons.

Elizabeth P.: My senior year when I was doing my student teaching, I got paired up with two awesome master teachers that were at the end of their career. I will never forget them, Mrs. [Morensy 00:03:15] and Mrs. [Booten 00:03:17], and they not only took me under their wing, and really showed me what it meant to be a really awesome, caring teacher, but they also allowed me to dabble in this whole idea of music integration.

Elizabeth P.: They let me listen to music with the kids, and we'd write stories, and draw cartoons, and do poetry. Even just talk about what emotions come up for us as we're listening to different excerpts of music. That just kind of stuck with me and I developed a lot of lesson plans around that, that semester.

Elizabeth P.: Then when I got a job the following fall, I just hit the ground running with my little second graders that I was teaching back then. We'd listen to music every single day and we would talk about it, and can then use it every once in a while to write about it. After about a year of teaching, I discovered there was a masters degree program just in a couple of towns over that had to do with arts and learning. I'm like, "This is it." Speaking my language here.

Elizabeth P.: That was really awesome, because it allowed me to dabble in other art forms that I'm really not comfortable in. Visual art, drama, then some that I think I'm good at, but probably not to others, like dance, story telling, digital media, all that great stuff, and it just gave me piles and piles of ideas and applications and turned that music integration into all kinds of arts, and it just expanded from there, and I just knew that that was the road I wanted to take.



- Elizabeth P.: Yeah, so since all of that, I've got two books published on arts integration topics and of course the website, The Inspired Classroom, where it was just a way for me to kind of get my ideas down, and kind of develop my philosophies around teaching, which has been so beneficial to me.
- Laura: Awesome. Hopefully to other teachers too. You know, I jot down my little notes, my little doodles while we have these conversations with our podcast guests. I was just thinking, one of the things I loved that you just said, was that you mentioned your mentor teachers by name.
- Elizabeth P.: Yes.
- Laura: To me, that's really important, because you know, we do talk about this connection of, it's not just our digital connections with our friends on Twitter, and things like that, but it is these real life connections that are so impactful and meaningful, and [crosstalk 00:06:02].
- Elizabeth P.: So true.
- Laura: I just really appreciate that you mentioned your mentor teachers, because I think that that is essential to what we do, and I'm constantly trying to get our really great veteran teachers to do ... It's a lot of work to be a mentor teacher.
- Elizabeth P.: Yes it is.
- Laura: It is. It really is. A lot of work that you don't get paid for, and voluntary reward-
- Elizabeth P.: So true.
- Laura: I'm constantly trying to encourage teachers to do that, because without those mentor teachers, we can't continue to build our profession, so thanks for shouting out to them.
- Elizabeth P.: Absolutely. I mean, any teacher can tell you that you're not really learning how to teach until you're in front of a class, and learning from other teachers, because that is really ... That's the key, right there. For sure.



Laura: The special part of all of it is that they embraced who you were, and that you wanted to bring music and arts into the classroom and allowed you to develop that idea of arts integration. That's really exciting. That's ...

Elizabeth P.: Yeah.

Laura: Well, you certainly are an expert on arts integration, but you seem to have turned this corner on social-emotional learning. Where did that come into play?

Elizabeth P.: Yeah, well, I mean. Any teacher nowadays, if you've been in teaching even five years, you've probably seen that there's almost this shift in our students and their needs. You cannot go into teaching anymore just thinking you're going to teach awesome content. You've got to really be able to reach the students in new ways.

Elizabeth P.: It seems that the whole idea of social-emotional learning, certainly is coming into play, not just in my state and my region, but across the country, because kids need learning and how to deal with stress, and anxiety, and getting along with one another, and I have my ideas of why this is all happening, and that's a whole other conversation.

Elizabeth P.: I'll get on my soapbox for a moment here with, we really need to start focusing back on pre-K, Kindergarten, let the kids play.

Laura: Right.

Elizabeth P.: Make it age appropriate, because now I teach fourth grade. I went to second grade for a couple of years, I taught middle school music for seven years, and now I'm in upper elementary, fourth mostly, a little bit of third, and kids have so much trouble working together and using manipulatives. They're walking around with scissors open and it's just like, are you kidding?

Laura: They don't even know how to hold their scissors. It's crazy.

Elizabeth P.: Yes. It's really those basic foundational skills are just being lost, so now education, the whole educational world is trying to play catch-up with this. When a couple of years ago, the district that I work in Amesbury, Massachusetts, they started to start pulling in the idea of social-



emotional learning into the district. We all got together, we were learning about this, and they're talking, and every single time they said another competency, self-awareness, I'm like, "You could teach that through art." Self-management, I'm like, "Play on a drum." Social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making. I mean, the entire creative process is all about responsible decision making.

Elizabeth P.: Every single thing that they were saying, I'm like, "It is right in front of us." It's all about incorporating and integrating all the arts together with what we're doing, and it just seemed like such a natural combination of helping students develop their social-emotional skills, while they're creating art, or appreciating art, or discussing art of all forms.

Elizabeth P.: Yeah, so it kind of played around with the letters there, came up with SEAL and I'm like, "This could be something here. Let's run with this." I did and I'm so glad I did, because it is resonating with so many teachers across the country, and even into other countries as well, because anyone who's really done any kind of art form, knows that you just learn so much about yourself, you learn so much about others, the world around you, it's just so natural, and it's really, it's just what's needed.

Laura: In the visual arts, we used a lot of project Zero's work from Harvard, and there's the Studio Habits of Mind, and one of them is understanding art worlds, but in our district, we really kind of break it down to understanding the world around you and your community, and when you think about even those eight studio Habits of Mind, like being able to envision. They're all connected to social-emotional learning.

Elizabeth P.: Absolutely.

Laura: It's crazy how big ideas like that make so much sense to the arts educator, or the arts integration specialist, because it really is. I just wrote down your quote here, "The entire creative process is about responsible decision making."

Elizabeth P.: Yeah.

Laura: That's huge. There's going to be a quote image that goes out [crosstalk 00:11:26] we'll put that on there, because that is so right on.



Elizabeth P.: Awesome. With the Studio Habits of Mind, you know that was really geared towards art teachers-

Laura: Right.

Elizabeth P.: ... so when I think it's finally happening is that this whole new way of talking about social-emotional learning, it's branching out and it's something that all teachers can grasp on, and really do something with.

Elizabeth P.: I bumped into a friend of mine just the other day at the local pizza joint. We started talking and he's now working in a high school, and he's like, "Same social-emotional needs, just a little bit bigger."

Matt: Oh, absolutely.

Laura: I see that all the time, especially with my new teachers.

Matt: No, it is. It really is.

Laura: I'll have a young teacher that did their student teaching at maybe middle school, and they end up maybe with ninth or tenth graders. They're a little nervous, because they've never been with ninth and tenth graders, and I'm like, "All they are is middle schoolers in bigger bodies." I mean, they're not that much difference.

Matt: I mean, I'm seeing that. I've made the change from middle school from teaching elementary for 13 years, and it's really not different. It's ... I mean, yes, there are some things that are there that more that social-emotional, but it's still you get down to the gist of it, it's still the same. It really is.

Laura: Honestly, the bottom line for kids is that sense of belonging, and going back to the arts integration, it's providing a niche for them. Every kid needs to belong somewhere, whether it's the theater group, or the band group, or the choir group, or the art kids. Every kid needs that belonging place. It could be the cheerleaders, or the football team, it doesn't ... just as long as they have that sense of belonging and that they have purpose.

Laura: That's what I feel like in a lot of ... I've been doing a lot of thinking about this too, especially as we're raising a now middle schooler and our girls



are just right behind him, and I think about, we used to have these rights of passage for kids, where they learn something about themselves, right? It seems like a lot of that has gone by the wayside, so how can we provide those pieces for them in another way? You know? How can we have them understand their own personal growth and be able to reflect on that? Again, get us back to the creative process, it's all right there. You see [crosstalk 00:13:50] in the creative process [crosstalk 00:13:52].

Matt: I was going to ask about that. I mean, [crosstalk 00:13:53] questions you asked during the chat was, "How is the creative process a learning process?" I'd like to hear some of your answers on that.

Elizabeth P.: Sure. How is it not, right?

Laura: Right.

Elizabeth P.: From inception of what you maybe even think about what you want to create, all the way through all the different pathways and decisions you need to make, from materials you're going to use, to who you're going to work with? Who you're going to avoid working with? Who you're going to ask for help? What do you need to research? What do you need to check up on? All those preliminary things before you even get creating.

Elizabeth P.: Then there's the whole creating of the whatever it might be. Whether it's a piece of music, or dramatic play, or a little skit even. It doesn't matter the smallest or the largest of whatever it is you're doing. Then of course there's also the revision part, the editing part, the writing process is a creative process.

Laura: Absolutely.

Elizabeth P.: And is a learning process. It makes those things a learning processes that throughout that whole path, you are figuring things out about other people, why do I want to work with this person and not that person? Why am I going to go to this teacher for help on this and not that one? All those things you're doing subtly and you may not even realize it, but you're learning about people around you and what makes a good person for certain situation.



- Elizabeth P.: Then of course you're learning about yourself. Are you a good time manager? Are you a good ... are you organized with your materials? Or do you need help with that? Are you asking for help with that? Just there's so many question's that go along with that. Then the revision.
- Matt: Should you ask for help? Should you not ask for help? No, absolutely. And progressing.
- Elizabeth P.: Then there's that right? Do you want to revise and edit what you're doing? Or do you want to just be fine with it and be done, and like, "Okay, I've done that and now I need to move on." Or are you going to improve upon it? And then are you going to present it? This 100 million questions you're basically asking, and all through that way you're really learning.
- Laura: Yeah.
- Matt: Yeah.
- Laura: Absolutely.
- Elizabeth P.: So much and it's a subtle kind of learning, so what I like about the idea of SEAL, having kids go through that process, that creative learning process, but also being very explicit with what it is that they're doing, so using the language of social-emotional learning, and because we're at the point where we just have to do that. We have to tell them, "When you're making a decision of who you're working with, you're using your social awareness, you know that so and so is going to be reliable and friendly, while this other person's going to throw a pencil.
- Matt: Yeah. Being on their phone.
- Elizabeth P.: All those things, so. It's really ...
- Laura: You know though, it's really exciting to see it happening though. Our kids at our district in Plano is doing a really nice job of integrating the social-emotional learning. Our little first grader comes home with all kinds of little techniques and things that she says about working with others, or even herself, like, "I just need a moment to breathe mom." From a first grader.



Elizabeth P.: Yes.

Matt: I needed a break-

Laura: I needed a break. I needed to remove myself from this situation.

Matt: ... that's why I left.

Laura: She uses these very grown up words, but it's because the teachers are being very intentional about teaching social-emotional learning. I just think even our son a little ... kids argue and the girls, our little girls are just about two years apart, and they were sitting there just ... and our son was like, "Okay now, if you consider maybe moving away from each other, you wouldn't burst each others bubble so much." I was like, "Okay."

Matt: Whoa, all right. Sure.

Laura: I just think that ... I'm curious to see what will happen years from now when this generation of children is grown.

Elizabeth P.: So true.

Laura: What the impact it will have on our society and just being compassionate and kind and not honking each other. The minute you don't go when the light turns green, you know? Things like that. Just taking a moment, you know?

Elizabeth P.: That's I think why it's so important for teachers to learn these methods and to really dig deep into them. I have teachers going through the SEAL eCourse that I have, or I have a SEAL retreat coming up in a couple of weeks. The point of that is for them to actually go through some of these experiences and to really absorb all that there is in terms of all the different art forms and all the different competencies, and transform how you think about teaching kids this social-emotional learning stuff.

Elizabeth P.: Because it's, like you were saying, it's so great for a teacher to figure out and understand what a kid needs and if that need is to put tape on paper for a little while because [inaudible 00:19:26], I have a kid like that right now. Or encourage someone to go out for the cross country team,



because you can just tell that they need that, and they might not get that encouragement at home to do that type of thing. That's really what I think being a SEAL teacher is really all about, and it's about caring for your students enough to make that change in your own mind, that own mind shift.

Elizabeth P.: Connecting with your students in ways that really only the arts can really do, and allowing for that creative outlet for kids so that you can really discover what floats their boat? What makes them happy? And how can you encourage them to do more and more about that?

Elizabeth P.: Laura, I love that you said your daughter came home and said, "I needed a moment to breathe." I think teachers are really being so explicit now, and it's good, because kids need to practice these skills, so that when they're in that heated moment, they kind of know what to do.

Laura: Well, every kid is so different. Like you said, their needs. We have three.

Matt: Well, all three of our kids are different. Extremely different.

Elizabeth P.: Right?

Laura: That little ... and she's six by the way. Only six, and this is the one that said, "I need a moment to breathe," but she is the most ... How do I say this nicely?

Matt: Strong-willed?

Laura: Strong-willed. Yes. Strong-willed of our three children.

Matt: Strongly determined?

Laura: And very determined. It has to be her way, so I can only imagine when she's at school, her really and truly needing a moment to breathe, because being in a cooperative group is not her jam.

Elizabeth P.: That's great.

Laura: I can see this. We've talked a lot about creativity and intention and some other conversations we've had with other educators. I think that intentional piece is so true, but I do also think that the relationship you



have with your students is key, because without that relationship, you're not going to know their needs.

Elizabeth P.: That's so true. Very true.

Susan: Hey there, it's Susan from Education Closet. Elizabeth is a good friend of mine, and I'm so glad you can finally hear her on the podcast. You know, social-emotional learning is so important, and personally, I think the arts are a natural fit. If you want to learn more from Elizabeth, check out her online social-emotional artistic learning course, at theinspiredclassroom.com/sealonlinecourse.

Susan: You'll be able to get grad credits, PD hours and a wealth of resources for SEL and the arts. Now, let's get back to the conversation.

Laura: He's trying to read my writing.

Matt: Oh.

Elizabeth P.: I love it.

Laura: Like I said, I jot down notes during all these conversations and he's like, "What does that say?"

Matt: We were talking about how art teachers ... well arts I should say, not just art teachers, but the arts feel so comfortable in this area of creativity, and the social-emotional part and how that interacts so well. We found, and it's not all the time, but we found especially through our chats, the teachers, the gen. Ed. teachers are either not sure, they're uncomfortable, they're afraid of how to work it in, how to chunk up the time, "Oh, well if I chunk up the time then I'm going to miss out on this, or I'm going to do that." How do you see or what do you see as teachers ... Maybe their fear or of pulling that creative piece in and really pulling on that social-emotional part?

Elizabeth P.: Yeah, so I've been working with teachers and teacher professional development for years, and that really is one of the biggest thing, when arts integration is teachers fear of doing art form that they're just not comfortable with, or they just don't think that they're proficient in. The first thing is, teachers don't need to be proficient in these.



- Laura: Right.
- Matt: No.
- Elizabeth P.: If they just have enough comfort to just give it a try, that's all their kids need. It could be that you ... and I do this all the time. You draw something and it looks awful on the whiteboard, and it just cracks the kids up-
- Laura: Yeah, it's a good thing then.
- Elizabeth P.: ... and you know, stand there like, "Oh, well I can do this," and they're showing me what they can do, and I said, "Well, next time I need to draw a dog on the board for this word problem. Maybe if you do it instead." You know, just to understand that you putting yourself out there is going to let the kids acknowledge that you're allowing for creativity in your classroom. That's really the message.
- Elizabeth P.: It's just opening that door to let them know that you are an appreciator of creativity in whatever form that might be. That's what the kids need to hear so that they can start doing that.
- Laura: Yeah, that's the basic one.
- Elizabeth P.: There was more to that question though.
- Laura: Well, just I think just finding ... first I think it's getting over the fear factor and the comfort level for teachers, but I've had a few different roles in education, one of them being an assistant principle and working with gen ed teachers. There definitely is this pressure I think on them to get through content and time.
- Elizabeth P.: Yes. That's what it was.
- Laura: I think that they feel like if I stray away from the content, like if I'm a social studies teacher-
- Matt: We're going to run out of time.
- Laura: ... and I have a semester exam that's given at the district level and all of this content's going to be on that district exam, I have to stay on the



calendar. I don't have time to be creative. I don't have time for the fluffy social-emotional stuff, you know?

Elizabeth P.: Yep. Absolutely.

Laura: I think that's the pushback I feel most often as an administrator. It's just that there's this pressure. They've got state assessment, and they've got to know this stuff, and there's only so much time.

Elizabeth P.: You are speaking my world right now, because as a fourth grade teacher, we have this much math content to get through before May, when there's still two months left of school, and it's cram time right now. It's disgusting really how we have to go through all of this content in such a short time and these kids are just not ready for it, but we've got to make sure that they at least are exposed to ... It's a horrible situation to be in for teacher and for student for sure.

Elizabeth P.: What I try and do for arts integration and for SEAL integration, is I've got some strategies that I just kind of use throughout my day. One of my absolute favorite strategies is sound tracking my classroom. I am able to kind of set the mood. I'm like a DJ in my own classroom-

Matt: Nice. There you go. Okay.

Elizabeth P.: Which I kind of think is cool.

Matt: That's awesome. No, that's great, I'm thinking of athletes, like sports runners. I have a really good friend who is a music teacher at the elementary. She and I were very much on the same page with a lot of things. We even teamed up on a couple of different things through our subject matters that we were teaching. I was teaching in The Harlem Renaissance, and she was teaching about jazz, the start of jazz, so it was just something that went together really well.

Matt: But she's a runner, and she's always telling me about these different apps, these running apps that will DJ your music to your pace for running, and that will help you either increase your speed or decrease your speed or whatever. It's just interesting to hear you say that, how that music impacts us so strongly.



- Elizabeth P.: Yeah. My kids will come into some upbeat music and then I'll slowly transition it down. I have a couple of songs that just bring that tempo down and the feel down. When we're doing math, or we're doing language arts, or reading groups, I have some really nice low non-rhythmic alpha wave type of music going on, and it really just encapsulates our classroom, which by the way is an open concept school.
- Laura: Oh no. My ADD just went like, "Oh my gosh." I just had a panic attack, I'm so sorry.
- Elizabeth P.: It's crazy that I didn't know I would be successful with it, but you know what? It just creates this little bubble around our classroom, which is really nice. In terms of other kind of ... all throughout the day, it's just kind of like, part of our culture in my classroom is we're doing movement breaks, and we're doing movement breaks that are connected with math, so we might make our arms in parallel lines, or put our legs in an isosceles triangle, then trace it with the floor as our base. We do that every single day and we're constantly getting up and transitioning and moving to help self-manage, to get our bodies under control.
- Elizabeth P.: There are some other things that on the spur of the moment, my kids know I might need a dramatic check-in, so they make their little face into an emoji to tell me how they're doing, or they may draw one really quick on the corner of their paper, so there's all those little ways that you can integrate the arts into the day, that are literally 30 seconds to a couple of minutes. They just really make a really big difference.
- Elizabeth P.: The other thing that I've done is, something that came out of SEAL is Friendly Friday's.
- Laura: Sounds like a perfect hashtag.
- Matt: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Elizabeth P.: It is. Yeah, I just actually ... I just wrote an article, it was posted in Edutopia about Friendly Friday's. Basically what that is, is those Friday afternoons when it's like, "What am I going to do?" Instead of Friday fun where it's kind of a little ... can be a little kooky, Friendly Friday's when we're doing something together as a class, or we're creating notes for



another person in the class, or another person in the school, and they don't know that they're going to receive something.

Elizabeth P.: Their creativity goes through the roof, their intention goes through the roof. They constantly ask, "Are we going to do Friendly Friday?" If I skip one, oh boy, watch out. [inaudible 00:30:28]. We do things for other people. We've had Friendly Friday's, where we're friendly to ourselves and we talk about positive self-talk, and we talked about wanting a pep-talk, how to give a pep-talk to someone, and we'll try that through some dramatic play.

Elizabeth P.: That has allowed me to keep some SEAL activities consistent in my classroom, so that they know that it's going to happen, and I always make sure that everyone's a part of it, and it's really helpful to bringing the class together. Really giving them some good social awareness about who's in their classroom, and accepting their capabilities as far as what your card might look like when you get it, or acknowledging that someone in our class has insane artistic ability and to really appreciate that when that person gets to make something for you. It's really been a great thing to put into my classroom, into my weeks.

Laura: We love that.

Matt: That's awesome.

Laura: I'm totally going to encourage our teachers to do it. I love, love, love it.

Matt: I think as we wrap up, I was wanting to know if there were any other insightful parting words you might share with our listeners?

Elizabeth P.: Sure. Oh boy.

Laura: I know.

Matt: There was a lot there, but you know.

Laura: Best practices.

Elizabeth P.: Yeah. I think that the biggest thing for teachers is to just allow for creativity in their classroom, and the kids in front of us have changed, that's for sure. They need more than ever, they don't need the harsh



discipline anymore. What they need is an open heart, and an open mind from their teachers, and that feeling that their teachers actually do care about them.

Elizabeth P.: One way to do that, if you're not a hugger, or you're not a put your hand on his shoulders, or the kids can't handle taking that kind of stuff. I know I teach in elementary, but I've been in middle school too and kids just know when their teachers care about them, because they allow a little bit of that creative freedom for their students. That goes so far when it comes to students understanding that their teacher really does care for them and really wants what's best for them, and really wants to help them find their path.

Laura: Yeah.

Matt: That's awesome.

Elizabeth P.: Yeah.

Laura: Even just those parting words have me thinking about more questions I would love to ask you, but we don't have time. We'll have to have you back, because I'm even sitting here thinking about you said the kids have changed. I would also venture to say that we've changed as adults.

Matt: Yes [crosstalk 00:33:27].

Laura: There's a lot going on in our world right now and there's a lot to think about. The self-care piece of it is huge. Just like you said you do Friendly Friday, about your own taking care of yourself. I think that there's a lot. Like I said, we could do a whole nother hour or two on this, because I know I have a lot of thoughts on it, but-

Elizabeth P.: Don't get me started on teacher centered PD. That'll be another couple of hours.

Matt: We can imagine.

Laura: We could totally go there. We will definitely have to have you back and-

Elizabeth P.: All right. Awesome.



Laura: ... and certainly back on Twitter too, but thank you so much Elizabeth. It's been wonderful visiting.

Elizabeth P.: Well, thank you Laura and Matt. It was really great to be here. I really appreciate talking to you. It was fun.

Matt: Thank you.

Laura: Thank you. Well, keep doing great work and we will talk to you soon.

Elizabeth P.: Excellent. Thanks so much.

Laura: All right. Thank you.

Matt: Thanks Elizabeth.

Laura: Bye.

Matt: Bye.

Elizabeth P.: Bye, bye.

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