

Tammy Friend ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to The Guide for Life Podcast, exploring topics related to the personal competency skills that empower Arkansas students and teachers to thrive at home, school, on the job, and in the community. Hi, I'm Tammy Friend, and I'm here with Laura Wooldridge of Williams Baptist University. She is assistant professor, and she is here to visit with us a little bit about social emotional learning in higher education. Hi, Laura.

Laura Wooldridge ([00:40](#)):

Hi. I'm glad to be talking the you, and hello, everyone.

Tammy Friend ([00:43](#)):

Let's get to know you a little bit, maybe a fun fact, or three truths and a lie to get to know you a little bit.

Laura Wooldridge ([00:51](#)):

I was telling my husband, I said, "I need to come up with a fun fact about me." And he said, "What about playing three truths and a lie?" So I was like, "Maybe she'll want to play with me." So you want to try it?

Tammy Friend ([01:02](#)):

Let's do it.

Laura Wooldridge ([01:03](#)):

Okay. I'm a beach pro, that's my talent, if I were ever in Miss America, which I won't be. I'm just content sitting watching the waves, so that's number one. Your second choice is I've booked a flight to the wrong country, the right country, but to the wrong place. It was an island and I found out when I got there that I was in the wrong place. Within in the same year, I've had a wreck on my street and hit my house. You might not want to ride with me. And when I was little, my cousins and I would drive on the gravel roads, and we got pulled over one time, and they stuffed me down on the floor and covered me up with stuff because they thought they would get in more trouble if they saw a little girl. So what do you think is a lie?

Tammy Friend ([01:46](#)):

So funny. I'm going to go with you booked a flight for the wrong destination.

Laura Wooldridge ([01:52](#)):

No, that one happened.

Tammy Friend ([01:55](#)):

That's great. Where were you intending to go?

Laura Wooldridge ([01:58](#)):

I was intending to go to Exuma in the Bahamas, which would be Georgetown Airport, and we went to Nassau.

Tammy Friend ([02:06](#)):

Okay, well, I can see that being an easy mistake.

Laura Wooldridge ([02:10](#)):

It was a costly one. My lie is that within the same year, I had a wreck and hit my house. That actually happened within about a week of each other.

Tammy Friend ([02:20](#)):

Oh, no. Oh, no. Even worse.

Laura Wooldridge ([02:25](#)):

So that kind of gives you a preview of my life. It's a little bit chaotic, but fun.

Tammy Friend ([02:31](#)):

Yeah, these stories, even the bad experiences do make for good stories, I'll say that.

Laura Wooldridge ([02:37](#)):

That's what I tell my husband.

Tammy Friend ([02:41](#)):

So tell us a little bit about your journey into education.

Laura Wooldridge ([02:45](#)):

Well, I went to ASU and I was an early childhood major. And I had full intention of just getting my master's and then starting to teach. But August came and I got a phone call, a little school from Rector, Arkansas needing a fourth grade teacher. And so I thought, "Well, I'll just go interview," and I ended up teaching there. So I went ahead and did my master's as I taught, but I didn't go with my initial plan. So taught at Rector for a few years and then I moved to my hometown teaching in Paragould, and I taught at Oak Grove Elementary School, which was a wonderful experience.

Laura Wooldridge ([03:21](#)):

While I was there, I did a little workshop for teachers, and I got a taste of doing [inaudible 00:03:26] and I loved it. So that led me to doing some literacy coach work at Green County Tech, and I learned so much and grew so much, and then started doing a little, it's a school improvement job, like consulting work, but for a company called Elbow to Elbow, which is just the best in my opinion, where we work elbow to elbow with teachers and administrators, so just a great-

Tammy Friend ([03:50](#)):

And valuable work, yes. Anytime we can support teachers, very valuable.

Laura Wooldridge ([03:56](#)):

I loved that job. That kind of came to a close, and I knew it was coming to a close. And I woke up one morning and my friend had screenshot to me a job description for the job that I'm in right now. And I read it and I thought, "I could've written that. That's for me." So I applied, and I have been at Williams. This is my third year. I teach intro and all the reading courses, classroom management, and the field courses.

Tammy Friend ([04:22](#)):

So I met you when you reached out about a project that your students did. And you sent me the link and I so enjoyed watching their videos and how they were incorporating some of the social and emotional skills and strategies in their lesson plans. And you mentioned that you were a fan of The Guide for Life. And so with that being said, what got you interested in social emotional learning? It's been around for a few years now. It's taken on momentum. So what got you interested?

Laura Wooldridge ([04:49](#)):

I can't pinpoint anything. But you just start hearing things, and then you hear it more, and you hear it more and more. So my friend, Ashley Dean, she's a fantastic SEL girl, I would see things on her Facebook page, just little things she would say, and so that kind of got me on the road to researching and doing things like that, just looking more into it. And the more I researched, I was like, "I'm a true believer in all these things." It makes sense with what I've experienced. It makes sense with what I know. And so I've just kind of continued studying. And the idea to put it into coursework just was brewing. I was just trying to find a place for it.

Laura Wooldridge ([05:32](#)):

So in my classroom management class, I did a little bit of trauma informed teaching, and then I was proposed with the opportunity to teach field one. And so I was like, "Ooh, I can do it there." So I got the idea to do SEL instruction to teach my students about SEL. I got the idea to do that before midterm, and then couple it with cooperative learning groups.

Tammy Friend ([05:57](#)):

It's a natural fit.

Laura Wooldridge ([05:59](#)):

Yes. It was the first semester for me to try that. And we did our course evaluations today, and the students were saying, "I'm so glad we did SEL before cooperative learning groups." I was like, "Yes, that means I got my dream."

Tammy Friend ([06:15](#)):

Sure. Yes, it organically kind of flows from one to the other. And so many teachers intuitively, if they're teaching philosophy, incorporate a lot of social emotional learning, even before it was given a name.

Laura Wooldridge ([06:28](#)):

Right.

Tammy Friend ([06:28](#)):

Well, the whole child, I guess you could say the whole child approach to education. But there are so many teachers that are really most effective do incorporate them.

Laura Wooldridge ([06:39](#)):

They just do it naturally. That's what makes them effective in my opinion.

Tammy Friend ([06:44](#)):

Oh, I agree.

Laura Wooldridge ([06:44](#)):

A big key of it. So anyway, I just got the idea and it just worked great I think. And so we did some tweaking this morning. I told my field one class, they're my guinea pigs because they're the first time interview taught this course in this way. So we've got some ideas to help field one be even more powerful next semester. But I'm excited that we have the whole group of 19 teachers that when they start in the classroom, they will know about this stuff, and not just do it accidentally, but they can be intentional about SEL instruction.

Tammy Friend ([07:21](#)):

Absolutely. And that is one of the biggest components, is not to add anything extra to a teacher's plate, but maybe the way they deliver the instruction. The intentionality is vital really, to make it be successful.

Laura Wooldridge ([07:37](#)):

I'm always talking to my students about we have to structure our instruction, and so that intentional of just not throwing it out to be a group work because you might have a little monopolizer like me in a group. But if we structure it, then it can become embedded in SEL, like we are all a part of this team, and we all have something to give.

Tammy Friend ([08:03](#)):

Absolutely. And it is so student centered, just the premise behind SEL being student centered, where teacher's more of a facilitator. So what would you say that the teacher candidates, the skills that they need to have when they graduate, upon graduation when they're ready to go out and take their first job in a classroom?

Laura Wooldridge ([08:24](#)):

We could have a whole series of podcasts on this topic. So I had an amazing opportunity when I was doing that school improvement job. Part of my job was to train new teachers, and so a lot of those were nontraditional, but some of them were traditional. So I really got insight on looking at many people's rooms. What do I wish I could've provided them before day one started? And that's really how I kind of approached this job because now I have that opportunity to help them before they start. The skills they need, I mean first, I just think they need to have the passion and the calling. I mean, I can build them up with all kind of skills, but if they don't really have that calling, that draw to teach, I think something will always be missing.

Laura Wooldridge ([09:11](#)):

Our mission at WBU is to prepare teachers who are intentional, reflective, and growing. I think that little skillset right there kind of sums it up. I mean, they need to be prepared with skills to be intentional in how to design the room, how to do seating arrangement, how to do everything really. A skill for a new teacher, another one is just to be reflective, to be willing to reflect on the run, and then after a lesson. I think a willingness to grow is just huge. I tell my students, "If you saw me on year one and you see me now, you're going to see a different person." You know?

Tammy Friend ([09:53](#)):

Absolutely.

Laura Wooldridge ([09:53](#)):

And I hope that about you from beginning of semester to end of semester, that I should see differences in you. I'll try to sum it up very quickly because I have lots of opinions on this question, but I think a new teacher needs a proactive mindset. We need to go in with Smoky the Bear just imprinted on us that I don't want to be fighting fires after they happen. I really need to be planning, and that's where SEL fits just so beautifully, like I'm prepping for problems and addressing them before they happen. And of course, a teacher needs content knowledge, but they need to know how to teach it too. I can't just know my content, I have to know how to get it in kids' brains.

Tammy Friend ([10:36](#)):

Absolutely. Yes.

Laura Wooldridge ([10:38](#)):

And then I think communication, I think my first year, I was very alone. I didn't want to ask questions. I didn't know who to ask. And I think a new teacher has to be willing to put themselves out there to communicate.

Tammy Friend ([10:53](#)):

Absolutely, have that support system, where PLCs can come in handy.

Laura Wooldridge ([10:59](#)):

And the last skill, and then I'll stop on this question, is our chair, Charlotte Wheelless, she with our capstone students, she helps them to develop a resilience plan.

Tammy Friend ([11:12](#)):

Oh, nice.

Laura Wooldridge ([11:13](#)):

Yes. They spend quite a bit of time on it. But I think new teachers do need that plan because they're going to have bad days. They're going to struggle. I think that if they have that plan, just like being proactive, I have some ideas to help me through my rough days and times.

Tammy Friend ([11:30](#)):

That is great. You're training them to work with their students. You're modeling that by giving them the tools they need on the front end. How do you address academic behaviors? As far as just like I taught high school for 18 years, and so it was definitely the growth mindset. Of course, I taught theater and oral communications, and the classes that kind of lend themselves organically to addressing some of these issues anyway. Of course, I taught English too, a core subject. But as far as just turning work in on time, just some of those academic behaviors, how do you address your teacher candidates, this issue with them?

Laura Wooldridge ([12:15](#)):

I spend a lot of time lending my frontal lobe to them. I put a lot of focus into building executive skills. I know they're in their early 20s, so it's not all finalized. But I'm also trying to promote the urgency because I'm like, "In two years, you're going to be in the real world. You're going to have a boss. You're going to have all that stuff." So I really set super high expectations, but I try to back it up with I'm here to help you. I don't allow absences. And I tell my students, "It's 2021. There's no excuse. You can be streamed in. You can record it and all those things, you can watch later." But I really also try to promote like, "Okay. I know things are going to happen. Maybe you oversleep, but you have to problem solve." You know?

Tammy Friend ([13:04](#)):

Oh, absolutely. Yes, which is one of the Guide for Life personal competency skills that will make them be successful. It doesn't do any good to have the content knowledge if you're not able to deliver it or use it.

Laura Wooldridge ([13:18](#)):

I really try to model it. We're all growing. I do not expect that perfection. I hope they don't expect perfection from me. I really try to do that. My chair and I, we really try to pump up that progress not perfection thing, that we can be a model of that and hopefully that will carry over.

Tammy Friend ([13:36](#)):

Why do you think that teaching and learning these personal competency skills is important for teachers and students of all ages? Because we really are driving it home in the elementary and secondary education. But when we get into higher-ed, you know you mentioned before, well, they are just right there on the precipice of being out in the real world.

Laura Wooldridge ([13:59](#)):

I just don't see how a teacher can have the impact that they have the possibility to make without incorporating SEL into their instruction. I just think I'm always saying, "We've got to get our bang for our buck." You have potential. You have to maximize it. And so I think embedding this type of instruction will help allow a teacher to have their max potential. I always say, "I don't want a math teacher only focusing on math Laura. Math Laura is not that talented." And so I need you to be kind of looking at the whole me when you're teaching, and I really try to get our teachers in that mindset.

Tammy Friend ([14:37](#)):

And by you modeling it through your own structure and design of your class, that would have to make an impact.

Laura Wooldridge ([14:44](#)):

I think the teaching personal competency stuff, I'm just all these, emotional regulation, cognitive regulation, it's going to impact your classroom management. I always say, "I'm not going woo woo on you." This is real stuff. I think you will be a much better classroom manager, which will help you become a much more effective teacher.

Tammy Friend ([15:05](#)):

Absolutely, it trickles down for sure. In conclusion, I know you said you ask for feedback from your students, if you might share with us some of what they had to say about their learning.

Laura Wooldridge ([15:19](#)):

So I had told my students about this podcast, and I think they were excited that they could have little shine time too. So I just pulled some quotes, I just posted the question on Google Classroom and got some feedback. Marin Jones, which you might want to interview her sometimes, she has such good feedback about SEL. But I'll just read her direct quote, she said, "If we are not taught how to teach SEL, then it will not be taught to the students. I have never considered feeding the social and emotional needs of students, but now that I know, I don't think I could go a day without intentionally planning to help my students in these ways."

Tammy Friend ([15:55](#)):

Outstanding.

Laura Wooldridge ([15:57](#)):

So another one of my students, Morgan Brinker, she said, "I'm so glad I've been taught this before entering the classroom because I believe it will save me a lot of heartache and wondering for why a child is not complying or acting a certain way." She knows to dig into the why.

Tammy Friend ([16:14](#)):

Absolutely.

Laura Wooldridge ([16:15](#)):

It's exciting. I could go on and on with students. I mean, Hayden Crafton said, "It's going to optimize the classroom environment." And I'm like, "Yes, they get it."

Tammy Friend ([16:26](#)):

Exactly. It's creating those safe space, priming them just to be ready to learn.

Laura Wooldridge ([16:32](#)):

It's exciting.

Tammy Friend ([16:34](#)):

It is. Well, I appreciate you taking time to visit with me today and share some of your successes.

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Laura Wooldridge ([16:43](#)):

For sure. I encourage everybody to implement a little SEL, either explicitly, or embed it into your curriculum, even at higher ed. It is making a difference in my students' learning, and I think it will in their classrooms too.

Tammy Friend ([16:57](#)):

Well, thank you. I agree. Thank you so much.

Laura Wooldridge ([17:00](#)):

You're welcome.

Tammy Friend ([17:06](#)):

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