

GUIDING YOUTH TO NOBLE GOALS

A Practitioner Perspective

Susan Stillman and Lorea Martinez

Six Seconds

Purpose is conceptualized as an intention to make meaning for self and to contribute to a greater world. Purpose in youth is critical to well-being, especially in the areas of good health and overall life satisfaction. An intentional set of strategies can be employed by educators to infuse and integrate purpose into youth development, individually, in groups, in classroom curriculum, and in schoolwide programming. A specific EQ framework that incorporates purpose, the Six Seconds emotional intelligence model, is presented. We demonstrate ways purpose can be infused into youth development, classroom practices, and schoolwide structures, supported by the use of assessments for students and adults. Teacher education programs can support beginning teachers in their own development of purpose, while in-service continuing education programs help teachers alleviate stress and remember the reason for their choice of profession. Engaging with the concept of purpose imbues students with meaning making and supports their developing ability to define their role in creating a better society, now and in the future.

Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive. (Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground, 2017)

Your choices matter. You choose your thoughts, your feelings, your actions ... and that changes the world around you. What's the effect you want to have? If you have a clear picture of where you want to go, you'll make much more effective decisions. (Six Seconds, 2019)

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Purpose is an important contributor to self-development and how both youth and

adults contribute to the greater good (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Teachers who help students find purpose are giving them a great gift; they are helping them shape their daily and long term choices so they can “touch the future” (McKown, Jensen, Freedman, & Rideout, 2010, p. 12) and discover the impact they can have, the difference they can make on the world. Ideally, purpose focuses on “issues of future orientation, goals, and guiding forces that direct a young person through life” (Damon et al., p. 123), supporting increased awareness of self as well as deepening connection and positive contribution to society. Damon et al. (2003) posited that purpose in youth supports prosocial behavioral outcomes,

• Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Susan Stillman, susan.stillman@6seconds.org

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achievement, an ethical commitment, and a more appreciative sense of self.

Multiple ways of understanding purpose are suggested in the literature, and one salient definition suggests that “purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (Damon et al., 2003, p. 121). Purpose has been viewed both as a protective factor to counteract negative conditions, identity crises, pessimism and despair (Benard, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Piaget, 1958), as well as a proactive attribute to support deepening concerns for making a difference for self and others in the larger world (Damon et al., 2003). While Bateson (2000) asserted that purpose could potentially be construed as the way to “get quickly at what you want” (p. 439), purpose is most often distinguished by its focus on “noble” humane goals rather than those filled with hatred and a desire to destroy (Damon et al., 2013, p. 126).

With this distinction in mind, purpose in this article is defined and measured by one competency, “pursue a noble goal,” a component of an emotional intelligence (EQ) model created by Six Seconds (Freedman, 2010). The EQ framework presented here is developed as an action model that is practiced daily by hundreds of thousands of youth and adults, in schools, businesses, and communities throughout the world. As this paper illustrates, educators can help students develop purpose by supporting students’ individual development through a coaching relationship, as a component of a K–12 curriculum and classroom management system, and through a schoolwide, systemic commitment to this concept.

Mariano (2014) explained that purpose is a combination of internal aspirations and what the environment offers and provides. Moriano argued that studying environmental contexts was valuable to understand what features allowed youth’s purpose to emerge and mature, and how these could be supported for youth development. For example, in addition to contexts of gender, age, ethnicity, social

class, and culture, educational settings could provide opportunities that deepen students’ purpose emergence by allowing ample time and circumstances to intentionally reflect on their developing purposes and its relationship to their actions.

GOALS OF THIS ARTICLE

The goals of this article are to share with practitioners how schools infuse purpose in youth development, classroom practices, and schoolwide structures and demonstrate ways to help students develop purpose, along with other EQ competencies, in the school community. The Six Seconds framework contains a salient competency for purpose, Pursue Noble Goals (Freedman, 2010), which is a skill equally applicable to youth and the adults who teach and nurture them. We present a three-level framework for inclusion of purpose, where assessments support the development of a Noble Goal in both students and educators.

PURPOSE AND THE SIX SECONDS MODEL

Emotional intelligence or social emotional learning, as it commonly referred to in educational circles, is “the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development” (Elias et al., 1997). In order to provide a practical and simple way to learn and practice EQ, Six Seconds developed a three-part model to put EQ in action in daily life. This model has three important pursuits: to become more aware (“know”), more intentional (“choose”), and more purposeful (“give”). Under these three pursuits are eight specific, learnable and measurable competencies, relevant for youth of all ages from early childhood to adolescence, and for adults. The three goals and eight competen-



Source: Adapted from Freedman (2012).

FIGURE 1
Six Seconds EQ Model With Pursuits and Competencies

cies are shown in Figure 1. Pursue Noble Goals is the eighth and final competency, situated within the Give Yourself Pursuit.

Development of character, and by extension, purpose, can best be understood by studying its synergistic interrelationship with other character education and EQ competencies (Malin, Liauw, & Damon, 2017). An implication for educators, therefore, is that it is valuable to work with an integrated model of EQ, where Pursue Noble Goals does not stand alone, but assumes an important position in a holistic framework. Give yourself delivers the “why” and it implies acting for a reason. The two competencies in this pursuit, increase empathy and Pursue Noble Goals, help people answer the question “What do I truly want?”, so they can put their purpose into action by

connecting with others and attempting to make a difference in the world. When youth and adults recognize noble goal as the “why,” a foundation against which actions can be assessed, a powerful process of growth and change is possible. Figure 2 illustrates how finding purpose is embedded in the EQ model. A more detailed description of the Six Seconds model and where purpose fits, can be found on www.6seconds.org.

Noble goals have a special place in this EQ model, since they activate all the other competencies. When you are connected with your personal vision and mission, emotional intelligence has a powerful meaning and relevance. Having a clear noble goal helps you focus on what is most important and access your full power and potential. When you realize that



Source: Adapted from Freedman (2012).

FIGURE 2
Know Choose Give Framework

even your smallest actions help bring the future you want into the present, even the most mundane actions take on a sense of purpose and vibrancy. You make your legacy with every moment of every day (Miller, 2017).

Five criteria comprise the competency of Pursue a Noble Goal and help actualize it. Each of these criteria could be parsed for clarity and customized to engage with students' own experiences. Taken together, they define a higher aspiration, in accordance with Damon's definition of purpose, versus a more limited, short term goal (upon which the pursuit of purpose is built, of course).

1. Not complete in your lifetime: It is enduring and inspiring, something beyond the daily struggle. This helps maintain a long-term focus so you can avoid the confusion of short-term thinking.
2. Pointed outward: While everyone benefits, the focus is on others. This helps maintain an expansive vision.
3. Integrates different domain: It encompasses all dimensions of your life; pursuing your noble goal in one domain (such as school) supports and impacts all other domains (such as family).
4. Gets you out of bed: It motivates and inspires at a deep level; this helps you

have the energy when the going gets tough.

5. No one made less: No one has to be "less than" or "wrong" to pursue one's noble goal.

Adults coaching youth use the EQ model that includes noble goals to discuss behaviors and attitudes, asking about a particular situation, what students knew and were feeling, what choices they had made, and what did they truly want to have happen—while also reflecting on the criteria for a noble goal outlined above. Sometimes, for example, a youth may really want to contribute to a peaceful classroom, but their behavioral choices do not match their intent. A nonjudgmental awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and action, and a reflection on whether their choices aligned with their noble goals can be a powerful learning experience for youth.

APPLICATION: HOW EDUCATORS SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF NOBLE GOALS

Educators can help students be successful if they commit to teaching and modeling competencies essential for long-term accomplishments, such as resilience, tenacity, persever-

ance, and positive academic mindsets (Jensen, Freedman, & Stillman, 2016). Researchers at Six Seconds have shown that higher EQ competencies in youth, as measured by the Six Seconds assessment of emotional intelligence for youth (SEI-YV), correlate with higher scores for good health, relationship quality, personal achievement, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Jensen, Dijk, & Freedman, 2012). Through a regression analysis, researchers determined that Pursue Noble Goals is the second most powerful EQ contributor to two of the youth outcomes measured by the SEI-YV: good health and life satisfaction. The significance of this finding is that helping youth find and pursue their purpose, as measured by Pursue Noble Goals, can improve their well-being, satisfaction and health. Given these data, educators are advised to develop students' purpose in an intentional and structured manner, ideally within a comprehensive, longitudinal framework for bring social emotional learning (SEL) into a school (Freedman et al., 2016).

We consider that the development of purpose in youth should be integrated with the school's general SEL implementation efforts. For the purpose of this article, three key strands illustrate how purpose can be developed at the individual, the classroom and the school level.

1. Finding My Noble Goal

In this first strand, students and adults alike develop the critical competency Pursue Noble Goals, which can be intentionally placed within the scope and sequence of a SEL curriculum. In the section of the Self-Science Curriculum (McCown, Jensen, Freedman, & Rideout, 2010) defining the competencies, McCown et al. (2010) described noble goal:

Just as our priorities shape our daily choices, our noble goals share our long-term choices. These goals give us a larger sense of purpose, a way in which we can touch the future. Each fundamental EQ skill is activated by noble goals—which are

clear, compelling vision statements put into action. Helping student discover that they can have an impact on the world is one of the greatest gifts a teacher can bestow. (p. 12)

The following scope and sequence, presented in Table 1, breaks down the competency, Pursue Noble Goals, into objectives, showing what would be expected by grade level (Stillman & Martinez, 2017).

- Learn (L): Students are exposed to and begin to show awareness of the skill.
- Practice (P): Students use/apply the skills when prompted. They are able to use the skills with support.
- Integrate (I): Students apply the skills and strategies independently. They are able to use the skills in different settings and difficult situations.

Adopting a scope and sequence, such as the one presented, can provide educators with a roadmap to support youth in finding their purpose and setting up a few concrete steps to get there. Although pursuing a noble goal is a life-long process, exposing students to this concept and providing opportunities for them to discover topics that *move* them are essential to support students in developing purpose.

As noted earlier, self-science provides SEL lessons that engage students in various classroom activities meant to deepen their understanding of purpose. In one middle school lesson, teachers show a powerful video and ask students to talk about their experience watching the clip, summarize the main events and share how they felt. One such video shows a person in the Philippines literally lighting up the world for a community with no electricity, by inserting into rooftops, lights made out of soda bottles (A Liter of Light, 2011). Following the discussion, students actively explore their own purpose, or how they could “light up their world.” They might think and write about what's important to them in different domains of their life (friends, family, sports, community) and find common threads that they can

TABLE 1
Scope and Sequence

<i>Competency: Pursue Noble Goals</i>	<i>Grade Level</i>									
	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>
Explains how their decisions and behaviors affect the well-being of their school and community.	L	P	P	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
Identifies roles they have that contribute to their school, home, and neighboring community.	L	L	P	P	P	I	I	I	I	I
Describes what they learned about themselves in helping out others.	L	L	L	L	P	P	P	I	I	I
Activates the steps of a conflict resolution process (listen, express feelings, discuss solutions, make amends, etc.).	L	L	L	L	P	P	P	P	P	I
Explores a community or global need and generates possible solutions.	L	L	L	L	L	L	P	P	P	I
Works cooperatively with others to implement a strategy to address a need in the broader community.	L	L	L	L	L	L	P	P	P	I
Participates in activities that show they are agents for positive change within their community/world.	L	L	L	L	L	L	P	P	P	I

Source: Stillman and Martinez (2017).

weave together into a purpose statement, or the beginning of their awareness of a noble goal.

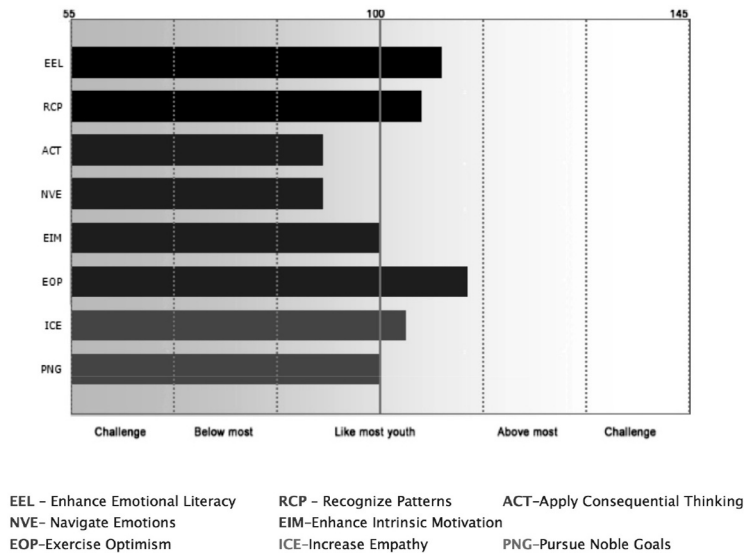
Following this phase, students might reflect on an action they can take to start the process of putting their noble goal into effect. We often have students use materials like wikistix or wires to create a symbol of purpose and then post these together on a wall, where the entire class or group can interweave their noble goals together. Following this activity, the class can brainstorm collective ways to demonstrate purpose as a group, and then decide on an action plan they will do together.

An elementary school in Clallam County (Washington), for example, has partnered with the organization Kids at Hope to help introduce purpose to students. One of the practices they have adopted is called “time traveling.” Educators ask students to visit their futures in four areas: home and family, community and service, hobbies and recreation, and education and career. Students have photo booths where they pose as their future selves and then, they create vision boards, that are shared with friends and families during college and career family night. In addition, the school has a com-

munity goal to connect students with residents in retirement communities and convalescents homes, since the town has a large retirement community.

Systematic assessment can assist students’ development of competence in pursuing a noble goal. Jensen et al. (2016) asserted that assessments should inform interventions and sustain the schoolwide long-term initiative of insuring that all constituents, individually and collectively, learn, practice, and apply EQ to make optimal decisions. In fact, universal and targeted assessments are considered part of a well-designed SEL program (Denham, 2015; d’Entremont, 2016; Elias, Ferrito, & Mocerit, 2016).

One tool educators can use is the assessment of emotional intelligence for youth (SEI-YV). Validated for youth ages 7–18, it provides a profile of the eight competencies in the Six Seconds EQ model, including Pursue Noble Goals. With the results of the SEI-YV assessment (see Figure 3), teachers, counselors, and coaches can work with students to understand all their competencies, how they relate to outcomes, and take steps to deepen



Note: PNG is the last competency listed, and found to be in the “like most youth” range.

FIGURE 3
Sample Graph of a Youth’s SEI-YV Scores

awareness, choices, and a sense of purpose. They can also compile a group report of student scores and measure change over time.

For example, the SEI-YV is currently used by middle schoolers in an independent school in California to set up personal goals. Students in the middle grades have “personal learning plans” that incorporate not only academic goals (I want to improve my grades in algebra), but also social and emotional goals (I want to feel more motivated in school). This learning plan is generally cocreated by the home teacher, the student and the families during the first parent conference at the beginning of the school year. Both academic and SEI-YV data are used to inform this discussion and create goals and objectives. During the second parent conference, updated SEI-YV and academic data are shared and discussed in relation to the goals established at the beginning of the school year. These personal learning plans help students develop greater self-understanding, and better connect their

goals and purpose with actionable steps supported by their teachers and families.

2. Classroom Practices That Nurture Youth’s Purpose

In the second strand, teachers are empowered to support their students to be change-makers, by measurably infusing Pursue Noble Goals and other EQ competencies into their classrooms and teaching style (Stillman et al., 2017). A school in the San Francisco-Bay Area (California) has created a course called “Social Innovation,” where fifth through eighth graders research problems that touch on foundational concepts such as human rights, ethics or social justice. In small teams, they identify a social problem they would like to generate a solution for via an innovative service or product. As students work on these problems, a team of venture capitalists from the local community offer workshops on market research, scalability and creating viable business plans.

During the course, students are provided with opportunities to engage in service learning to better research ideas and test their solutions. This is an experiential course centered around meaningful volunteer opportunities, innovative problem solving and pursuing a noble goal.

Educators can also support the development of purpose in the classroom by exploring role models (individuals and organizations) that have made highly visible contributions to our world (e.g., Edison, Mandela, Martin Luther King, etc.), and also others less well known but equally important. Students can identify people or organizations who have made a difference in their lives and in their communities. For example, they might talk about a parent who worked with the local school district for 2 years to remove toxic turf from schools. This exploration, which can be integrated in English language arts or social sciences, will help students to begin considering how their own choices and those of others can have a positive effect on the larger world.

Finally, teachers can incorporate students' purpose in the classroom by connecting students' noble goals to the topics and subjects that are being taught in school, and creating opportunities for students to pursue their noble goals within the classroom. For example, in 2013 then-first-grader Christian Bucks asked his principal to put a "buddy bench" at his school, Roundtown Elementary in York, Pennsylvania. A buddy bench is a special place in a school playground where a child can go when they feel lonely and need a friend. After a local newspaper published an article about the Buddy Bench, the story spread to media outlets like *Today* and *The Huffington Post*. Today, there are more than 2,000 buddy benches around the United States. With the help of his family, Christian maintains a website with information about buddy benches, has recorded several videos with his principal, and is invited to talk about his ideas on friendship and bullying in schools. Educators can help students, like Christian, by teaching the skills they will need to pursue their noble goals, and

helping them identify potential challenges and sources of support.

Another example of a student working on her noble goal of increasing inclusion among middle school students, and decreasing bullying and ostracism is an 11th grader in California who recognized the need for an app to help students find tables in the school cafeteria, where they would be accepted. She designed SitWithUs, an app that allows students to designate themselves as "ambassadors," thereby inviting others to join them. Ambassadors can then post "open lunch" events, which signals to anyone seeking company that they are invited to join the ambassadors' table.

3. Schoolwide Commitment to Noble Goals

In the third strand, schoolwide SEL implementation, schools consider ways to incorporate Purpose into their mission, policies, procedures and schoolwide activities. Using assessments, like the SEI-YV group report or a school climate assessment (Freedman, Jensen, & Stillman, 2012), administrators and faculty can read the mood of the school and with mixed methods, measure a sense of overall purpose or noble goal. Schoolwide activities can then be targeted to help students deepen their purpose even more. For example, regularly holds student-led assemblies that celebrate themes related to socioemotional, character, and citizenship development. Students from elementary and middle grades work together to select the themes they want to celebrate as a community and then, they prepare activities and materials to present in front of the whole school.

Noble goals can provide a unifying function for school curricula that often can feel disconnected for students. In a school that identifies itself as a "changemaker" school, educators choose one person to study for the entire year and integrate this focus into all subject areas. Teachers intentionally identify the relevant noble goals embodied by that individual as they study her or his impact. Last year, the

changemaker was Neil DeGrasse Tyson, the American astrophysicist, author, and science communicator. Understanding our world and the world around us and making it better—including the interpersonal world—was catalyzed by Dr. Tyson.

Another school in the Northeast created a service-learning committee focused on helping students develop leadership toward finding their purpose. One of the authors of this paper, a former school counselor, led an eighth-grade peer support/peer helper program group for almost 20 years. Fully supported by the administration and teachers, students were chosen by both peers and teachers for demonstrating purpose and the ability to help others. Students underwent extensive training in coaching their peers who were experiencing challenges, including dealing those with interpersonal conflicts. These students worked diligently with peers, from kindergarten to Grade 8, who were in need of support. At the same time as these peer support students were helping others, they were developing their sense of purpose and noble goal as well as strong leadership skills.

PREPARING TEACHERS: DEEPENING PURPOSE TO INSPIRE STUDENTS

The most strongly purposeful youth who do mention schooling as an influence often reflect on how a teacher, in particular, was fundamental to the development of their purpose. (Moran, 2016)

A school climate study (Martinez, Stillman, Boffa, & Proccichiani, 2016) focused on middle school students demonstrated the value that students place on deep relationships with their teachers, and how they look to them to model purpose and other EQ competencies. Clearly, this places many demands on teachers. How do teachers maintain the motivation and stamina to be able to provide students with this guidance?

Jennings (2015) stated that teachers stress reduction and general well-being are improved

with a focus on their own social and emotional competencies, which, in turn, impacts not only their own but also their students' well-being. Moran (2016) found that teachers seek strategies and coaching training to help students discover personal meaning and enable them to transform this personal awareness to pathways to purpose. As teachers enter the profession, in preservice education, they can be encouraged to identify and deepen their own noble goal. Later, during in-service training, teachers can be supported to review their goals, and have the opportunity to decrease their stress and potential burnout by attention to the "why," the reason they felt called to enter education.

Teacher education programs can help beginning teachers reflect on their own life paths, so they feel more emotionally and intellectually equipped to help their future students consider theirs. The inclusion of purpose in teacher training would support teachers to introduce this same development in their own curriculum and instruction (Moran, 2016). Bundick and Tirri (2014) posited that in the same way that teachers need content area knowledge prior to teaching it to students, teachers should consider and develop an understanding of their own purpose or life's goals, before they are able to intentionally help students with theirs. Jennings and Frank (2015) suggested that professional development for teachers include the same SEL content that their students were learning. They suggested that teachers need the opportunity to reflect and practice applying these same skills in their professional work.

However obvious these suggestions might seem, the field has been slow to bring them into practice. In one teacher preparation program in the southeastern United States, educators integrated the Six Seconds competencies into their teacher preparation both in the syllabus and materials (Martinez & Stillman, 2017) of several required courses and at a program level. All entering teacher candidates took an EQ assessment (Freedman, Ghini, & Jensen, 2005) and attended a 2-day EQ training course, helping them to become aware of their own EQ

skills, including Pursue Noble Goals, and reflect upon developing them.

In the 2-day training, for the section on purpose, facilitators gave a brief description of the pursue a noble goal competency. They showed an emotionally powerful video about someone pursuing a noble goal. Facilitators passed out a worksheet to allow participants to begin the process of writing down their noble goal. Then the group used sticky wires to create a symbol of their emergent goal and pasted them on the wall. Finally, facilitators led a whole-group discussion, asking “How might this change you, your teaching and classroom?”

This same university integrated the EQ competencies with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching framework (2017). Pursue Noble Goals is aligned with instructional planning for expectations and environment, and with managing student behavior (2017).

When educators take an assessment that measures the same EQ skills, including Pursue Noble Goals, as those assessed in their students, and when they learn and work through these competencies for themselves, profound insights and skillful application of EQ skills to their work with students are possible (Stillman et al., 2017). When teachers recognize and think through their own sense of purpose and how it translates into classroom practices, when they intentionally practice Give Yourself, and act with purpose and empathy, it is likely that their students too will increase their desire to pursue and practice a noble goal. However, this has yet to be reliably demonstrated empirically. Still, as the quote below implies, the pursuit of noble purpose by teachers would seem to be strongly connected with that pursuit in their students.

I am a teacher. I look at my classroom and I see the next generation of astronauts and inventors, healers and artists, mothers and fathers, thinkers and dreamers.

My students will make discoveries, both big and small.

They will shape the marketplace, influence culture, improve lives.

And I will help them.

I will help them know themselves, other people, and the world around them.

I will help them become kind, collaborative, and changemakers.

I will help them, because I am their teacher.

My students will change the world. Because I will change theirs. (Ashoka, p. 84)

CONCLUSION

Purpose can be conceptualized as one competency, Pursue Noble Goals, in an integrated approach to emotional intelligence/socioemotional learning, recognizing that purpose alone does not lead to purpose attainment. In this paper, purpose also is presented as a guiding principle for a holistic three-level framework (Freedman, Jensen, Stillman, & McCown, 2016) to develop purpose in youth, focusing on individual, classroom, and schoolwide goals. Educators themselves can benefit from understanding and expanding their own sense of purpose, their pursuit of a noble goal, as this will help them overcome stress and become more adept at inspiring purpose in youth.

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