

**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

Social Emotional Learning is Not Just Something You Hope Sticks to the Wall

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June 6, 2016 Updated June 4, 2016

One of my greatest flaws as an educational leader was my compulsion to promote new initiatives without considering how they would be institutionalized in the school and sustained over time. I helped my faculty "throw" wonderful ideas on the "wall" but didn't lead them to think about how these ideas would "stick" for the long term.

There are terrific social emotional learning programs on the market. Responsive Classroom, Peace Circles and Tools of the Mind immediately come to mind (CASEL provides a wonderful resource page that describes 23 of these strategies), but elevating these programs to school culture status is as important as bringing them to light from the start.

My failures and success have taught me how important it is to weave social emotional learning into the cultural fabric of the school (i.e. institutionalize). This can be done by:

Installing rituals and routines (Deal and Peterson extensively researched the importance of doing so in their 2009 work*)

For example- Create a routine at the elementary school that would have children and school personnel engage in a regular community activity at the start of every school day.

For example- Schedule one middle-high school class period per week dedicated to team building activities and small group personal discussion.

Repeat, repeat, and repeat- Don't let much get in the way of consistency and carry on the rituals and routines regardless of intrusions and distractions.

Weave new "language" in everything that is said- Create mantras and make those mantras highly visible by posting them on the walls, video monitors, and publications distributed to the school community.

Carrying the culture forward calls for sustainability. This can be done in part by creating easy-to-read, small, go-to protocol books (social emotional learning "bibles") that codify strategies. I've sometimes forgotten the importance of documenting those things I want to have passed down the generations. Knowing the culture-change I helped facilitate is memorialized makes gives me a sense of confidence that my successor will recognize the importance of sustaining the culture and will have a guide to help him or her do so.

I've also learned from experience the importance of assigning culture maintenance responsibilities to assigned positions in the school (as opposed to delegating these responsibilities to certain people who may have helped me change the culture from the start). This ensures longevity despite the potential turnover of personnel.

There's no problem with presenting an idea and gauging the reaction. Brainstorming proposals is a good way to get social emotional learning ideas rolling but think of longevity as being as important as the start-up process. "[Make] a single day's work an achievement for eternity" (actress Helen Hayes) and think of the kids who years and years from the present who should reap the rewards of the wonderful culture fostered from the outset.

This piece was originally submitted to our community forums by a reader. Due to audience interest, we've preserved it. The opinions expressed here are the writer's own.

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