

About Promoting Social Emotional Development at School: "Kernels" and Natural Opportunities

If you missed it, see the discussion of ecological approaches to social emotional learning being tested by Harvard University. The article emphasizes using flexible, bite-sized lessons ("kernels") "designed to be adaptable to students' interests and needs. to teach social and emotional learning."

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/09/11/can-bite-sized-lessons-make-social-emotional-learning-easier.html> .

One example offered in that article is how they deal with the problem of the transition from recess back to classroom learning. As described: "teachers began using exercises after recess that included structured discussions about what took place during recess, and if there had been a problem, how students could solve it and move on. The goal is to help them leave behind the drama of the playground and refocus on their academics."

Such a transition concern is a good example of a natural opportunity (e.g., daily transitions) for promoting social emotional development. See our Center's earlier discussion: *Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf>).

As the article on the Harvard program states:

Teaching social-emotional skills in class sounds great, and the idea has a broad and growing following in K-12 schools. In practice, however, executing evidence-based strategies to teach skills like empathy and self-control to students can be challenging for schools, and prohibitively so. Comprehensive SEL curricula on the market today can be expensive, putting them out of reach for lower-income school districts. They are complex and can be difficult to graft onto existing curricula and school day routines. And they may not be culturally relevant to all students.

So, besides new curricular approaches, here are some matters to think about as schools wrestle with the challenges of pursuing an agenda related to Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

- (1) Keep the big picture in mind: The aim is to continuously promote positive social emotional development - not just teach a limited set of social skills.
- (2) Identify places in existing curricula for embedding social emotional learning.
- (3) Map natural opportunities for promoting and supporting social emotional development at school.
- (4) Stress ways to improve how the school staff models social and emotional functioning every day.
- (5) Ensure that students have many opportunities and support to connect and build strong relationships with positive peers and adults at school.
- (6) Also transform how the school staff responds to students' learning, behavior, and emotional problems to ensure that the responses enhance positive social and emotional development and school climate.

Addressing these matters goes beyond just thinking about SEL. The need is to embed the growing emphasis on SEL into the school's focus on both promoting positive development and addressing barriers to learning and teaching. See:

>*Improving School Improvement*

>*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*

Both accessible at: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html