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Building community With adolescent English language learners

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BUILDING COMMUNITY
WITH ADOLESCENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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BY
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a year of teaching in which the author used social and emotional learning strategies to build community in her classroom of English Language Learners at Macfarland Middle School in Washington, DC in 2001-2002. The author's adaptations to components of Northeast Foundation for Children's Responsive Classroom model are discussed. The conception and implementation of the author's own project, Passport Patners, is included. The major research supporting Social and Emotional Learning is briefly presented, as well as the wider implications of addressing or not addressing students' social and emotional needs.

To the Children of Washington, DC

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INTRODUCTION

Last year I staged a revolution in Room 200. It was a quiet revolution, conducted without fanfare and flag waving, but it marked a profound shift in the way I recognized and responded to the social and emotional needs of learners in my classroom. This paper documents this revolutionary year and the research that informed it as I attempted to create a respectful and caring classroom community of English Language Learners (ELLs) in a rough and chaotic public middle school in Washington, DC.

In the first chapter, I describe my own experimental efforts to meet students' social and emotional needs while simultaneously helping develop their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. (Please note that wherever possible teacher and student names have been changed to protect privacy). I describe the Responsive Classroom model that formed the basis of my approach, and, using examples from my classroom, I elaborate on elements I adapted to better serve the needs of ELLs. The second chapter describes my efforts later in the year to bring social and emotional learning outside of my classroom to the larger school community with a project called Passport Partners.

In the third chapter, I explore the growing field of social and emotional learning (SEL) and the many ways SEL meets the needs of learners. Chapter four examines the urgent need for SEL in our schools, the clear links between SEL and academic achievement, and the dire implications of **not** meeting our students' social and emotional needs. I examine the trend toward high-stakes standardized testing in our schools and the potential the Leave No Child Behind Act has to undermine the social and emotional needs of our nation's most economically disadvantaged students. Finally, I conclude

with a summary of lessons learned in this experimental year. The appendix includes a list of sources consulted, samples of handouts, surveys and student work, and lists of web sites and publications concerning the field of SEL. This paper is the story of one teacher's exploration, presented as a collection of teaching scenarios, classroom dialogues, and informal observations and data collection, supported by current research in the field of social and emotional learning. It is my hope that this story will encourage other educators (of ELLs and non-ELLs alike) to examine the social and emotional needs of their students and to discover the profound connection between building a learning community and building life-long learners.

Seeds of a Revolution

Last year I began my third year of teaching science to English Language Learners (ELLs) at a public middle school in Washington, DC. After two years of trying to get students on the same page--working together, cooperating, getting down to the business of learning--I was frustrated. I had a whole curriculum of standards to teach to, but in previous years, I had been unable to deliver the lessons effectively, in large part because I couldn't get kids to settle down, keep their hands off each other, and focus on what I was trying to teach. Our school, which placed consistently at the bottom on standardized testing score rankings, had adopted an intensive reform model, which held students and teachers to high levels of accountability and provided mandatory teacher training sessions designed to encourage and support us in raising student achievement. But instead of inspiring me, the planning meetings often left me feeling empty and desperate. How could I implement the steps of Writers' Workshop when kids were fixed on refining their abilities to insult one another in English? How could my students carry out comprehensive applied learning projects when they were busy fighting with each other?

Getting on Their Page

Then, in my second summer of graduate school, I stumbled upon a realization that shook the foundations of my developing teacher identity. During a discussion on the role of the teacher in the classroom, I was asked to consider what would happen if I subordinated *my teaching to their learning*. In reflecting upon my teacher-centered approach over the previous two years, I realized that I had been struggling to get them on the same page--MY page. What would happen if I acknowledged where they were at, and got myself onto THEIR page? I began by considering what we as teachers and students held on our respective "pages". What were the hidden (and not- so -hidden) agendas we carry with us into the classroom every day? As a relatively new teacher in a "reforming" public school, my page was crowded with lists of standards, reform model requirements, benchmarks, content areas, and assessment dates, all framed by the school's mantra that "All Children Can Learn." I had content to cover, various learning levels to accommodate, and records to keep. We had business to take care of. Students were so far behind in basic skills, we had no time to waste.

But what about their pages? Admittedly, their pages looked quite different. My students are immigrants (mostly Hispanic and African) trying to bridge the culture they left behind and the new one in which they find themselves. They are adjusting to new family situations, a new language, a new school, and their own changing adolescent bodies and minds. I imagine their pages as jumbles of memories, emotions, questions, developing theories, wonderings, anxieties, thrills and discoveries; pages crammed with colors, stickers, notes, lists of friends, lists of enemies; pages of love poems, song lyrics, and graffiti. I realized that if I were really to acknowledge and honor the challenges these students faced, my approach to teaching had to change. Yes, standards, content areas, and assessment would remain areas of concern, but of utmost importance was helping students find meaning, celebration and connection in their struggles. My role as

a teacher was to create a safe learning environment based on respect and caring where students felt welcomed, supported by and supportive of each other.

I wondered what would happen to academic achievement if I put the students' social and emotional needs first. Could I teach English language skills while honoring their struggles as immigrants, adolescents, and language learners? Were there existing models of SEL programs that I could adapt for use with my students? This year, I would find out. I would make every attempt to subordinate my teaching to their learning, meet them on their page, and strengthen their skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking while building their strength as a community. With this resolution the seeds of revolution were planted.

CHAPTER 1

BUILDING A CIRCLE OF RESPECT

My homeroom class, with whom I would spend the majority of each school day, was a group of seventeen immigrants, eleven to fourteen years old, most of whom had been in the United States less than a year. They hailed from all corners of the world--the Philippines, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru. They had been placed in my class based on their high-beginning English level. Officially I was to teach them Life Science, social studies, and study skills. Unofficially, we would learn how to get along, how to support each others' struggles, and how to care about each other--in English.

The Morning Circle

I was fortunate that my schedule allowed me to meet my homeroom students for 90 minutes every morning. Starting the day in a Morning Circle became the foundation of our new classroom community. Based on a routine outlined in the Responsive Classroom Approach developed by the Northeast Foundation for Children (Kriete, 1999), the Circle was the most consistent element of our classroom structure. Throughout the year the activities in the circle continuously evolved to reflect developing English skills and to offer variety, but the overall format and goals remained constant. The goals for this thirty minute routine include:

a) to model and practice polite greetings in many languages

- b) to acknowledge each student in the circle each morning with their name and a greeting
- c) to develop skills of deep listening (without interruption)
- d) to share and build empathy among students
- e) to foster inclusion and equality of participation in the group
- f) to develop skills in English reading, writing, listening comprehension and speaking
- g) to help students transition smoothly into their academic day

The Morning Circle routine, as outlined by the Responsive Classroom approach, consists of 4 main components:

- 1) The Greeting/Check In
- 2) Sharing
- 3) Group Activity
- 4) Reading the Morning Message

The Morning Greeting

To begin the morning routine, students start every morning with their chairs in a large circle. A leader begins the greeting by using the quiet signal (a leader with a hand up is a signal to raise your hand and focus your attention) The leader chooses the language of the morning greeting from a list of international greetings in the front of the room and greets the person to his/her left with enthusiasm, a handshake, and direct eye contact. The greeting passes around the circle, with students focusing on projecting their voices with confidence so everyone can hear.

At first I was concerned that the students, being teenagers, would find this routine babyish. I was careful to introduce the importance of all of us feeling welcomed and present in the morning and stressed the importance of everyone's attention as the

greeting made its way around the circle. I forced myself to be consistent and not let disrespectful greetings pass, instead, drawing the group's attention to what was lacking and asking the students to try again. Once students settled into the routine, they became quite attached to it, even complaining, on the morning of a field trip, when we didn't have time to circle up. However, variety remained the key to the greeting's success. Variations include silent greetings, invented handshakes, the use of a ball to change the order of the greeting, timed greetings, standing greetings, silly greetings...the possibilities are endless and welcomed, lest the routine become monotonous.

Adaptations for ELLs

Honoring the Struggles of Separation

It was halfway into February, and Dolores had been out of school for three weeks visiting family in sunny El Salvador. On this particularly gray morning, after the greeting made its way around the circle, Maura sighed with a sad voice, "I miss Dolores!" Heads nodded in agreement. Reading the rather heavy energy of the group, I suggested we all call out a greeting to Dolores, in absentia, at the count of three. One, two, three... "BONJOUR, DOLORES!" they shouted in unison. The collective delight was palpable. "I miss Ms. Susan!" someone called out, referring to my mother, who had recently spent several weeks in the classroom assisting with science projects. We gave an enthusiastic greeting to my mother somewhere in Maine. I remembered Kevin's journal entry about missing his mother in Honduras. I thought of Marisela's grandmother who had gone back to El Salvador. "Are there other people you care about that you want to send some love to somewhere in the world?" I asked. Nods of acknowledgement from around the circle. "I'll count to three again, and this time we'll shout out Bonjour to whoever we want around the world. Ready? One, two three...*****

The heavy mood of the group had floated away, channeled into thoughts of love sent to Ethiopia, Mexico, El Salvador and the Philippines. Having the greeting circle in place allowed students an opportunity to creatively deal with their feelings of distance and loss--if even for a brief moment. The acknowledgement that we all had someone we were thinking of and greeting at that particular instant brought us all closer. It had taken only moment, but it brought us all miles.

Checking In

In November, I attended a middle school conference where a break-out session on building classroom community introduced the idea of having students “check-in” every morning by stating how they are feeling at that particular moment. Students check in simply by saying, “I’m checking in. I feel ____.” (happy, sleepy, sad, confused, nervous, etc.) If they choose, they can elaborate on why they feel that way, or they can simply name the emotion or emotions. Checking in serves to bring everyone into the present by naming their emotions (thereby possibly releasing some of what they are holding on to). It helps the teacher get an emotional reading on the group, and allows students the space to develop empathy and support for their classmates. When I returned from the conference, I instituted a daily round of checking in, which followed immediately after the morning greeting.

To impart some ceremony and depth to checking in, I tried to introduce the passing of a “power object” (in this case, a conch shell), which gave the right of speech to whomever was holding it in their hands. Later we had several power objects that were meaningful to the class, and the leader for the day chose which object to use. On the first day we tried checking in, I noticed students passing the shell quickly and casually, handing it to the next person before they had even completed their own sentence. I realized that I had not modeled the use of the shell well enough, and stopped to give it

more attention. I suggested that as we held on to the shell, if we were feeling strong and happy, we could give some of that energy to the shell. If we were feeling sad, or sick, we could draw energy from the shell. In that way we could support one another. They let this idea settle for a moment. Then I modeled holding on to the shell, reflecting for a moment, checking in, and then passing the shell purposefully to my neighbor. I was reminded of how important it is to model and practice again and again. I would have to intervene many times before checking in was running with the dignity it deserved. Later in the year, when Maura was nervous about giving an oral presentation, she got the shell from my desk and held onto it while awaiting her turn to get up to present. She gave me a shy smile and said, “Because I’m nervous, Ms. Antal.”

As with the morning greeting, checking in needed endless variation to keep it lively and effective. We went around the circle “checking in” by using a facial expression to show how we were feeling that morning. We held up fingers (1-10) to show how we felt. We drew pictures, modeled clay, we held thumbs up and down. I noted which students checked in feeling sad, confused, or sick and tried to speak to them at a quiet moment at some point in the day. I encouraged all students to be conscious of how others were feeling, and as a class we talked about ways to support someone who is feeling sad, sick, or confused.

Checking in became a good source for vocabulary generation, as we soon grew tired of basic adjectives like good, sad, bad, and great. We kept a growing list on the wall and students referred to it regularly, scanning it for a moment before choosing the word that best fit at that moment.

Sharing

The second component of the Morning Circle was Sharing. In Sharing, the person sharing first gains the attention of the group with the raised hand signal. The sharing is

generally about something that is happening in the student's life--a grandmother coming to visit, a birthday party, a newborn cousin, a phone call from relatives overseas.

Occasionally an object such as a photo is shared. Upon completion of the sharing, the sharer states, "I'm ready for questions and comments," and calls upon classmates with raised hands.

At the beginning of the year I struggled to get volunteers to share something with the group. I tried using a theme (something about my weekend, a person who is very important to me...) and going around the whole circle, always allowing the option to pass. This often seemed to drag along, with the majority of the class opting to pass. In retrospect I realize that the trust of the group had not been established enough for students to offer their stories without fearing classmate's disrespect. For several weeks I tried a sharing calendar, like the leader calendar, in which students signed up to do the sharing. Again, they always had the option to switch with someone else if their day came and they didn't want to share. Eventually, sharing evolved into an occasional, instead of daily event, entering into the routine when someone had a significant announcement to make.

For my students, asking questions was easier than giving comments, and though I would occasionally model a comment myself, (Your mother must really appreciate you looking after your little brother like that...), participation throughout the year revolved around basic information seeking questions.

Adapting Sharing for ELLs

Recording the Questions

In the original Responsive Classroom model, the sharing session is conducted orally. In my class of English Language Learners. however, I soon saw the benefit of writing the questions so everyone could see the structure, spelling, and vocabulary used.

We started to record the questions as they were asked, with me rephrasing if necessary and writing them on the board, and an appointed Recorder noting down the questions in a class journal. Being the Recorder was a coveted position, particularly for one severely learning disabled student who couldn't actually write her own sentences, but relished the sense of belonging and responsibility that the role of Recorder afforded. Some very diligent recorders even noted the responses to the questions, even though I did not write them on the board. I also noted the particular care some students gave in designing borders around their entries, signifying a sense of pride in their contribution to a class record.

Using Translators

Often students would have exciting news to share but would be reluctant to attempt in English. In this case, the student appointed a classmate to the role of Translator. The Translator (often a Spanish speaker) was also a coveted position, responsible for correctly conveying the meaning to the rest of the class. Even those Spanish speakers who were not appointed listened very closely to make sure that the translation was accurate. Occasionally the exact details of a story would take some time to sort out, and I made a point of acknowledging the patience of the non-Spanish speakers as the translator worked to get the story straight. Collectively we talked about how it feels when you can't quite explain what you mean, and how important it is to feel supported by those around you.

Checking for Comprehension

After several weeks of sharing, it appeared that the same students were asking the questions. I began to wonder if the silent students had questions but were too shy to speak out, and if they were understanding the responses given to other students'

questions. After the sharer had responded to all questions, I began doing an informal comprehension check, going through the questions on the board and rephrasing them (How old is Maura's cousin? What did she get for her birthday?) to see who would respond. Interestingly, students who were shy about asking questions were eager to answer the comprehension check, happy to participate in this less intimidating way. It seemed that many of the quietest students actually understood the most! I was surprised by the enjoyment students found in this exercise. They never tired in showing what they understood, proud of themselves for listening carefully to their classmates. And the sharer was delighted by the chance to be the focus of attention--both socially as the one with the interesting story, and academically as the subject of a written English demonstration.

It became my practice to give the recorded questions as a dictation at the end of the day, reading them directly from the class journal. Students often smiled as they took the dictation, remembering the sharing from the morning, and often they wrote the answers as well as the questions. They remembered exactly who asked the questions and took pride in recognizing their own questions being read back to them as "English Dictation." As this practice went on, I noticed many students copying down the questions in their own notebooks in the morning as I wrote them on the board--a form of practice for the dictation they knew would come later. Even though they were not required to copy the questions, and the dictations were not graded, students took the exercise very seriously.

Asking More Interesting Questions

"I went to my cousin's birthday party on Saturday and we stayed up until 2 in the morning!" Katty declared. "I'm ready for questions and comments." Fireu raised his hand. "Were you happy?" Sighs of exasperation and rolled eyes from the rest of the

circle. Fireu always asked this question, and it was getting boring. I jumped in. “I see some of you acting as if you don’t like Fireu’s question.”

“It’s boring.” someone says.

“What do you think Katty is going to say?” I ask.

“She’s going to say, ‘yes’.”

“So you think her answer is going to be kind of boring. You want to know more than that about the party.”

Nods of agreement.

“Fireu, you were listening carefully to Katty and you want to know more about what she is sharing. How can you ask your question so Katty has to answer more than yes or no? How can you ask so that Katty has to use more English?”

Fireu isn’t sure, but Ramadan raises his hand. “He can say, How did you feel at the party?” and then we don’t really know what she’s going to say.”

“OK. So we can use the word ‘how’ to make things more interesting. What else could we ask?”

Silence.

“Could we start with the word ‘What’?” I prompt.

“What did you do at the party?” someone offers.

“What was the best thing about the party?” someone else chimes in.

“What did you give your cousin?”

“If you ask a question with ‘What’ can Katty answer yes or no?”

By this time, even Fireu is participating. Katty is glowing. Things are getting interesting.

Toward the second part of the year, students were very comfortable with sharing, and questions were becoming routine and dull. Dull questions lead to dull answers, and

sharing was falling into disfavor. With the incident above, our focus turned from merely asking questions to asking the most interesting questions that we could. We officially banned yes/no questions from the sharing circle and the object became to try and get the sharer to use as much English as possible to answer the question. The structure of the routine changed as their collective command of English developed, helping students recognize their progress.

The Group Activity

The third component of morning circle is the group activity . The activity, which may be a game, gives students a chance to have fun together first thing in the morning, helping them wake up and be fully present for the day to begin. Activities are always cooperative instead of competitive, though sometimes the group challenges itself by imposing a time limit, or trying to beat a previous time. The activity is short (5-10 minutes), and is chosen by the leader (unless the leader can't decide, in which case the teacher chooses!) Circle games are listed on the wall, and new games are introduced, by students and teacher alike, throughout the year to maintain the sense of variety and fun. Initially I tried to get everyone to participate in the activities and was met with tremendous resistance, particularly if the activity involved having to get up out of their seats! Some students flat out refused to move. Later I learned that it's best, in building a supportive community, that students always be given the option to pass (in the case of sharing) or be a witness (in the case of an activity).

Being a witness, I pointed out in explaining the role to students, does not mean that you talk to your friends or do your nails while others are playing the game. Witnessing means watching the interactions, listening to the English being produced, noting who is taking a leadership role, remembering what is being said. It is essential, if there are witnesses, that the witnesses be called upon after the activity to report their

observations. This reinforces their participation in the game and their importance in the group.

Adaptating the Activity for English Langugae Learners

Using Games to Generate English

One of our most successful games using witnesses was a human pretzel knot, where eight students made themselves into a knot in the center of the circle and then tried to disentangle themselves without letting go of their hands, using only English to communicate. I found that giving the witnesses a specific task to do was helpful in keeping their attention focused on the activity. In this case, the task was to write down any English words that they heard, and, if they could, the name of the person who was speaking. The game was challenging, and the witnesses were able to record a list of English phrases (Be careful! Not like that! This way! Step over her hands!) that were helpful in working together. As a group, we generated more phrases, practiced them for pronunciation, and then tried the game again to see how many of the expressions we could use.

As every new game was introduced, I found it helpful to write key phrases on the board and model their use. When students told me I was the only teacher who let them play games in class, I asked why they thought we played games every morning. They spoke, in their own words, to the importance of presence, inclusion and community in our classroom.

“So we can have fun together and not fight.”

“So you can know everybody.”

“Because sometimes in the morning you have a bad day at your house and you’re angry but when you play the game you feel better.”

I asked them if they thought playing games helped their English.

“Yeah, because you have to talk to do the game, and not everybody speaks Spanish.”

“We learn more words.”

The Morning Message

The fourth component of the morning circle routine is the reading of the morning message. The teacher writes the message on the board each morning, using a consistent format that gradually becomes more challenging and varied as reading skills improve. At the end of morning meeting, the leader reads (or chooses someone else to read) the message out loud while the class follows along. New words can be highlighted in different color marker for later discussion. Generally the message ends with a question concerning the material to be explored in the upcoming lesson, thereby creating a bridge from the morning circle to the first class of the day.

A typical morning message in my classroom might look like this:

Dear Students;

Konichiwa! Today is Monday, October 23, 2002. Marvin is leading. Sara is sharing.

Did anyone go to the Hispanic Day parade on Saturday? I saw some of you there!

Today we will continue working on our science projects. How did your plants change over the weekend?

Sincerely,

Ms. Antal

In the Responsive Classroom format, the message is often interactive, asking students to respond to a question on the board by drawing a picture, checking a box, or writing their initials in a space provided. This encourages students to read the message as soon as they enter the room and helps ease them gently into “school mode” in the morning. I chose to post a separate warm up on the board and did not develop the interactive message, though in retrospect, I think it would have been useful as a community builder to get everyone’s responses on the board. To be honest, sometimes I couldn’t think of anything creative to say in the morning. (Responsive Classroom’s Morning Meeting Book has some excellent ideas on keeping the message alive.) But students came to expect the message and would read it for special announcements instead of asking me (What time is the assembly today? Is today a half-day? Is the other class coming to see our posters today?) The message was a realistic opportunity for them to develop reading skills.

Adapting Morning Message for ELLs

Morning Message and the 4 Skills

The morning message offered a variety of opportunities for students to develop their 4 skills in English. Sometimes I would read the message to the students. Sometimes one student would read. Sometimes everyone would read together. In a favorite variation, we would read the message together and I would erase a large swipe down the middle, so it might look like this.

Dear Students;

Konichiwa! Today is Monday, October 15th. The weather is leading. Sara is sharing. Did anyone go to the Hispanic Day parade on Saturday? We were all there! Today we

will continue working on our science projects. How _____ ge over the weekend?

Volunteers would continue to read (either alone or together) and each time I would continue to erase more of the message. Occasionally students could recall the entire message with accuracy. This challenge inevitably held everyone's attention!

Once a week I would write the message without any punctuation or capital letters. As a warm up, students copied the message correctly into their notebooks and we made the necessary corrections on the board together. With regular practice I noticed dramatic improvement in their mechanics on written assignments and journal entries.

At one point I tried assigning different students to be responsible for writing the morning message, but this became a tremendous production, with students clumped around the board experimenting with different markers, offering advice, critiquing penmanship, and adding illustrations.

Pretzel Power

Once students were comfortable with working together in a large circle, I added a new game, which proved to be an invaluable community-building tool. The game, which we called Pretzel Power, was created by teacher Ruth Charney, and is described in her book, *Teaching Children to Care*. (Charney, 2002) Pretzel Power provides a safe, fun and structured way for students to acknowledge and identify positive behaviors in the group and address conflicts non-violently. In addition, the game allows language learners to practice structures they need to identify how someone else's actions make them feel, as well as understand how their actions can affect others.

In Pretzel Power, students sit in a circle with 5 pretzels on the desk in front of them. They are not to eat any pretzels until the end of the game! As they feel ready,

each student in turn stands up and offers a pretzel to another student in the circle as a gesture of thanks. “I’m giving you this pretzel because I feel _____ when you _____.” In a variation to be added at a later date, after first giving away a pretzel, the student has an option to take a pretzel from any student in the group with the words, “I’m taking this pretzel because I feel _____ when you _____.” According to the rules of the game, students can only take a pretzel if they first give one away. Students must allow their pretzels to be taken and may not dispute or argue the claim. However, pretzels must be taken in seriousness, not in a kidding manner. After all students have had the opportunity to give and take, the pretzels may be eaten.

Variations for English Language Learners

For my students, I made sure to write the target language on the board and practice the pronunciation as a group before individuals were expected to perform. We prefaced the game with a general discussion on the kinds of things that classmates do that we really like, find helpful, are thankful for. Then we did the same with undesirable behaviors that made us feel frustrated or annoyed, describing the ways in which these behaviors kept us from learning. In this exercise, the object was not to name the individuals who demonstrated the behaviors, but to create a vocabulary base to work from as we moved into the game.

The game became a traditional Friday afternoon closing activity, and I was interested to see, as our community grew stronger and stronger, the dramatic reduction in the number of pretzels taken. Students instead had difficulty choosing just one person to give a pretzel to! Once I allowed students, after everyone had taken a turn, a chance to give out other pretzels if they wanted to. This turned into too much of a popularity affair, with some kids not receiving additional pretzels, so I discontinued that option.

Occasionally we substituted the pretzels with candy hearts (Valentine's Day) or candy corn (Halloween).

Because the structure "I feel _____ when you _____" became familiar to students, I was able to fall back on it when intervening in student conflicts, urging them to own up to their feelings with "I Statements" and show the offending party the effect of their actions. This was one of the most useful English phrases I taught during the year, and one that will hopefully continue to serve them throughout their school career!

Music and Rhythm in Community Building

I have long been a believer in the power of music to bring out some of the best qualities of human nature, build connections between cultures, and foster joy. A musician myself, I have had many chances to feel the power of community generated through song, dance, and drumming. The making and sharing of music has always been a feature of my classroom. In experimenting with the ways in which music relates to social and emotional learning, I was able to introduce music more formally into the structure of my classes.

Music plays an important role in the developing identity of the adolescent, and almost all my students listed "listening to music" as one of their favorite past times. Posters of music groups decorate lockers and notebooks, and students find ways of sneaking their own CDs through security check so they can share them with their friends. They print lyrics off the internet and memorize their favorite songs in English. I decided to try and honor this connection to music by dedicating a space in Friday's morning circle for a student to share a favorite English song each week. The student brought the song to me on tape or CD on Monday, and by Friday I had typed a copy of the lyrics to distribute. The student talked about what their song was about, what it meant to

him/her, why s/he liked the song. We listened once, and then sang the song together several times. The song went into the students' class song books, which were kept in the classroom and brought out during parties for singalongs. I play the guitar, so often I tried to work out the guitar chords so we could sing at our own speed.

While we managed to collect several favorite songs this way, and students enjoyed sharing with their classmates, I soon realized that most students had not been in the country long enough to have a favorite song in English. Most listened to tapes and cds from their own countries in their native languages, naturally finding security in the familiar sounds and rhythms of home. So I selected my own songs--songs that were easy and catchy to sing along with, that had universally appreciated meanings, could be played on the guitar, and didn't have too many words. Class favorites became *Stand By Me*, and *Here Comes the Sun*. We often sang these when moods were heavy, for celebrations, or if we had a few minutes before the end of class. I keep a box of percussion instruments behind my desk, and find class involvement much higher when we have a rhythm section going. Students were still encouraged to share music from their native countries, particularly during class parties. Next year I hope to have students teach me simple songs from their countries so I can teach others and create a more diverse collection for our classroom.

Singing in Sign Language

I once taught at an international youth camp where children from around the world performed a powerfully moving version of Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" in sign language. The effect of a multi-lingual group using sign as a common language was stunningly beautiful, and last year I decided to teach the song to my students. We listened to the song in English and discussed the meanings of the words. I taught them the signs, one line at a time, asking why they thought certain signs were used

to represent certain words. The practice of associating a written/spoken word with a silently signed symbol was a fascinating exercise for the students. They practiced the song daily, and many found they could remember all the words in English just by focusing on the order of the signs. A highlight of the year came at a school assembly when eight students from my homeroom dared to get up and perform the song for the rest of the school. They were received like heroes by their classmates later that day and several wrote about it in journals as something they would never forget. The song became our class “theme song” for the rest of the year.

Through the daily use of morning circle, promotion of music sharing, and weekly rounds of Pretzel Power, our class had blossomed into a closely knit, respectful, and caring community. Students clearly enjoyed coming to school, appreciated their classmates, and delighted in the hands-on science curriculum we explored together. There were moments of tension, but rarely did I have issues with classroom management to deal with. The collective trust we had invested in one another had built a kind of imaginary “container”--strong enough to hold any issues that arose. (Kessler, 2002)

But that was inside our classroom walls. I had only to step into the hallway for hall duty between classes to feel the chaotic wave of disrespect from hundreds of other students in our school who were not learning to be a community together. Cursing, pushing, shoving, running, racial slurs: I felt the open heart I held with my own students close down in defense as I hollered at students to stop fighting, to put that belt back on their pants, to keep their hands off each other. I saw my students march grimly down the hall to the cafeteria, their postures braced, their books held tight against their chests as if in protection. This was not a community, and my students did not feel safe or respected here. I couldn't blame them. I read daily reports in their journals of food fights in the cafeteria (African Americans versus Hispanics), food being stolen, kids being threatened

on the walk home from school. So what good is community if it exists only behind the safety of classroom walls? Certainly, respect in my classroom was a starting point, but if I was really getting on my students' page, as I had vowed at the start of the year, I would have to help them deal with the violence of the larger community around them. We needed to expand the container.

But how?

CHAPTER 2

PASSPORT PARTNERS

Reaching Beyond the Classroom Walls

The plan was hatched in January aboard flight 667 as I flew back from a conference in Los Angeles with a group of colleagues. On the long flight, I sat next to Ms. Baker, a young eighth grade English teacher who was interested in helping her students open their minds to the diversity of cultures in our school. Her students, in the classroom two doors down the hall from my own, were all African Americans, most born right in DC. Few had traveled beyond the Midatlantic United States, and only a handful had friends or acquaintances outside of their race.

I already knew from an earlier classroom discussion that only one of my students could name even a single African-American student in our school of 535! Even though my students had several “mixed” elective classes during the day, ate in the same cafeteria, and attended the same assemblies as the “mainstream” students, there was virtually no contact between the two groups. Positive contact, that is. There was plenty of threatening and posturing by the boys in the halls between classes, dirty looks cast between the girls, and racial comments made under the breath in both languages. The cafeteria played host to daily incidents of bullying, and notorious rounds of food fights. And although only a minority of students actively engaged in these negative activities, we were all continually exposed to them as a community. I could see no opportunities

for positive social contact between English Language Learners and African-American students at our school.

We designed the Passport Partners Project to create space for positive contact to happen. We realized that spontaneous mixing and acceptance were very unlikely to happen on their own; we had only to look at the outside neighborhood community to recognize the ways in which the school community of the children mirrored the divided world of their parents. It was up to us as teachers to structure safe opportunities for positive interaction to occur.

The basic idea behind Passport Partners is to match up a class of English Language Learners with American-born partners from a mainstream class. In the first phase of the project, the partners spend a month getting acquainted by writing to each other through shared notebooks, which are passed between the classrooms weekly. Students are encouraged to personalize the notebooks with artwork and drawings. Teachers guide students in writing their questions and answers and conduct sensitizing discussions related to any cultural issues that arise throughout the correspondence.

Once there is a degree of trust and interest established between the groups through writing, the partners enter phase two--meeting face to face. In this phase, both teachers conduct community-building activities with the mixed groups. The interactions are carefully structured, and in the case of the English Language Learners, modeled and rehearsed ahead of time to reduce anxiety. (See appendix One) Through games, songs, and team challenges, the partners grow more comfortable with one another. Trust continues to build, allowing for mixed group discussions of increasing depth.

In its first year of implementation, the project was able to enter the beginning stages of phase two. Since then, I have outlined the full five phases of the project and applied for a grant to support its development. (See appendix Two)

Real -Life Forum for Real- Life Issues

Several weeks into the exchange of notebooks the dialogues seemed to be going well. In general the girls were writing more, spending time to decorate the borders of the pages with flowers or pictures, or writing carefully with different colored pencils. (See appendix Three) They gushed openly about being friends (“Do you think we can be best friends?” Nicole wrote. “Yes, yes!” Jessica replied) They wrote about their families, their friends, school, what they liked to do on the weekends. The boys were more cautious with their conversations. They asked about favorite basketball players or sports cars, and occasionally added a picture of a sports hero. They wrote and revealed the minimum, but still I was happy they were reading and writing in English. They were concerned that their partners would not be able to understand what they had written, and they checked spelling and vocabulary with me faithfully.

I made it a habit to check their entries before delivering the notebooks to Ms. Baker’s class, just to keep a tab on where their conversations are going and if they needed help keeping up the dialogue. In checking the notebook shared by Ebony and Meron I discovered our first case of cultural misunderstanding. Ebony had asked Meron (a conservative Ethiopian Christian) “Do you like boys? If you do, what’s your type?” Meron had emphatically responded “I don’t like anything boys. Why ask me that question? I am not anymore write you becuase you ask is not good, is too bad” She had clearly been offended by the nature of the question, and I recognized an opportunity to explore the misunderstanding as a class.

I addressed the whole group with the question, “Whose passport partner has asked a question that made you feel uncomfortable?” It turned out that nearly everyone had been asked about having a boy or girlfriend, and not everyone was comfortable about it. “What can you write to your partner to let them know you are not comfortable with the questions?” I asked. We talked about why their partners might ask offensive

questions (were they *trying* to upset you or do you think they were just curious and trying to get to know you?) I listed several ways they might politely respond (I'm not comfortable with that question...) and then change the subject to something they *were* interested in discussing. I helped Meron construct another response, and updated Ms. Baker on what we had talked about in class. She helped Ebony to understand the sensitive cultural topic she had broached and helped guide the class through a lively discussion on cultural differences. In their next exchange, Ebony apologized to Meron for any misunderstanding. Meron forgave her and agreed to continue to be her Passport Partner. Through the use of the journals, a genuine case of cultural misunderstanding had been constructively explored and resolved, and students' concerns about cultural differences had been honored.

Beyond School Walls

"Ms. Antal, Jorge was in a fight with some Black kids outside the school yesterday." It was homeroom, and the class was abuzz with chatter and news. "Is that true, Jorge?" I asked. Jorge nodded and then explained that a group of Black kids were hanging around the library after school. According to Jorge, they were intimidating several Hispanic students who were passing on the sidewalk, and a stand-off began. The most vocal of the Hispanic kids was getting shoved around, and as the group started to pull Jorge into the tussle, another Black kid stepped in to stop them. "Hey, don't mess with him. He's my Passport Partner. Come over here, Jorge." Jorge's Passport Partner, Derrick, had recognized him (although they had only met face to face once, they had been writing back and forth for several months). Jorge wasn't just another "Hispanic Kid". He was a Passport Partner--an 8th grader from Mexico who had come to the US only 5 months before; a kid with a favorite basketball team and a dream

to be a doctor one day. Derrick was responding to the connection they had made. This connection, however tenuous, was strong enough to avert violence (at least for Jorge) outside the school. I wondered what would happen if every kid had a Passport Partner.

What the Surveys Said

As the school year wound down in June, I surveyed the Passport Partner participants from the two classes to determine their overall response to the project. Students were presented with twenty statements about the program (I learned a lot about my passport partner; I liked writing in the journal, etc.) and were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements by circling a number from one to five (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree). Although this was an informal poll, I believe the responses give some useful insight into the potential impact of the project. The results showed favorable reaction to the program from both classes (favorable being any answer that averaged over 3.5) (See appendix Four) Both classes reported that they had learned a lot about their partners, that they liked reading what their partners wrote, and that their partners asked interesting questions. Both groups wished they could have interacted more with their partners and thought that they would talk to their partners if they saw them in school the following year. Finally, both groups said they liked having a passport partner and would do the program again if they could.

Most interesting were the responses showing the widest difference of opinion between ELLs and mainstream students. ELLs agreed more strongly with the statement, “My passport partner is very different from me,” perhaps highlighting their heightened sensitivity to being the minority group in the school and their feelings of difference, or not belonging. Compared to the mainstream responses, ELLs agreed much more strongly that the program could help reduce violence in the school, and that the program

helps people respect each other more. An explanation could be that ELLs in general feel more threatened, insecure, and vulnerable in school than the mainstream students and recognize the power of the passport partners program to offer security, one connection at a time.

Comments from the ELLs on how to improve the program included,

“I feel good because the program help you to have more friends. To make this program better we have to get more people on the program.”

“We should do it every year.”

“I feel good becuase we can say hi to the passport partners and talk, even when they not passport partners anymore.”

“I feel happy becuase we talk with people that we never know.”

Comments from the mainstream class included:

“I feel good about this program because I have learned a lot from people different from myself.”

“We should do more stuff together.”

“We should meet more.”

“I feel comfortable learning about other people’s cultures.”

CHAPTER 3

WHY SEL WORKS

The strategies that I adopted and adapted in my classroom during my revolutionary year of teaching were elements all elements of the broadening field of social and emotional learning. Throughout the year, as I implemented new methods, I researched and read, trying to deepen my understanding of **why** what I was doing was working, and what else I could do to make things work better. I searched for other ESOL teachers who were doing the same thing, and I networked with others at every conference I attended. In the summer I attended a week-long Introduction to Social Emotional Learning course at the University of Colorado. Taught by Rachael Kessler of the Passageways Institute, this phenomenal workshop helped provide a theoretical framework from which to organize my ideas. I was introduced to many of the concepts in the following sections through the readings and discussions during that week. These ideas served to solidify my beliefs in an SEL approach to teaching and learning.

The Need for Deep Connection

One of the most helpful, insightful models to come from the course was Rachael Kessler's own Seven Gateways to the Soul of Education. (See appendix Five) Her book, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School* (2000), offers a framework for consciously honoring the inner lives of our students to help them find connection, compassion and character in school. Through many years of working with adolescents as a teacher and program developer, Kessler has

identified seven “gateways” to the soul of education, including the search for meaning and purpose, the longing for silence and solitude, the urge for transcendence, the hunger for joy, the creative drive, and the call for initiation.

The common thread running through all of these needs is that which I worked most carefully to foster in my classroom--the longing for *deep connection*. Kessler defines this thread as being “a quality of relationship that is profoundly caring and resonant with meaning, feelings of belonging, and a sense of being truly seen or known.” By fostering deep connections to self, to each other, to the community, to the adults in their lives, teachers can help address students’ inner lives by paying attention “to the depth dimension of human experience; to students’ longings for something more than an ordinary, material and fragmented existence.” (Kessler, 2002)

Emotional Intelligence--the Meta-Ability

Social and Emotional Learning pays careful attention to the development of students’ “emotional intelligence”, helping them prepare for roles as caring and responsible members of the community. Emotional intelligence, as defined by Daniel Goleman in his ground breaking best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence*, includes skills of self-awareness, handling of emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social communication. (Goleman 1995, 43) How often as teachers do we feel unable to teach children because of their inability to work together, their lack of motivation, their difficulty in resolving conflicts, or their inability to control or redirect their emotions? And how often do we see kids who *have* these skills in place rise to the top of the class academically? Social and emotional skills are the tools for resilience. They provide a solid foundation for academic achievement, and they are the tools that ensure successful futures for children. Goleman found that a child’s level of emotional intelligence is a better indicator of happiness and job success in later life than the traditional IQ test. “...

how adept a person is at [managing emotional competencies] is crucial to understanding why one person thrives in life while another, of equal intellect, dead-ends: emotional aptitude is a *meta-ability*, determining how well we can use whatever other skills we have, including raw intellect.” (Goleman 1995, 36)

Emotional aptitude plays a role in the careers our students may choose later in life. In a 1988 publication entitled *Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want* the U.S. Department of Labor reported that in addition to reading, writing, and computation skills, employers seek employees who have strengths in learning to learn, self-management, adaptability, group effectiveness, and listening and oral communication--all social and emotional skills that can be developed in school settings (U.S. Department of Labor, 1988) If schools truly aspire to prepare their students for successful entry into the work force, the domain of emotional aptitude cannot be ignored.

SEL and the Brain

In addition to fostering foundation skills for success in school and beyond , SEL drives academic achievement because of the special effect emotions have on the brain. In a 1994 article in *Educational Leadership*, Robert Sylwester reminds us that emotion drives attention; attention drives learning; and learning drives memory. (Sylwester, 1994, 60) Classroom activities that reach students on an emotional level are more interesting. When students are interested, they pay more attention. It is this attention that can help students build the contextual memory prompts to recall the information outside in the “real world”. In short, when students find a personal and emotional connection to the subject matter, the brain is more actively engaged, and deeper learning is taking place. We remember the things we care about and we remember the people who care about us. Students do not automatically care about what we have to teach them. It is our job to bring them to that point of caring--to help them discover within themselves the

connections to the subjects, the connections to their classmates, the connections to the caring learning communities that our classrooms can be.

Lowering the Affective Filter

English Language Learners may enter our classrooms with a resistance to speaking English. Adolescents can be intensely self-absorbed and concerned over how others perceive them, making risk-taking in a new language especially daunting. In addition to their developmental stage, the external stresses of adaptation to a new culture, new family, new language, and new set of peers can leave students in a delicate emotional state. The stress, fear, and anxiety carried into (and possibly intensified by) the classroom environment act as barriers to the input needed for learning. Language that might otherwise be comprehensible to students could be impeded by this high affective filter, slowing down the language learning process. (Krashen, 1982) When we teach in a way that recognizes and honors students' emotions and work to build a supportive community of learners, we lower their affective filter, helping students relax and open their minds to receive the new language that surrounds them.

CHAPTER 4

WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF IMPLEMENTING SEL

SEL and Academic Achievement

The more I continued to emphasize SEL throughout the school year, the more adept my students became at expressing their feelings, responding to one another, and working together. They demonstrated a very positive attitude toward school and learning, and attendance was at an all time high. Many expressed regret over having three day week-ends, much preferring to be with their classmates in school. In addition to their social skills, improvements in students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills were evident. Students were asking more elaborate questions during sharing session; they were writing more detailed messages to Passport Partners; they were taking Sharing Question Dictations more accurately. And although I was aware of the continuing growth in English abilities, the raw data that came back in June--the results of the standardized LAS test for English Language Learners--shocked me. My students had improved their reading and writing scores more than any other students on their level in the District of Columbia!

I strongly believe that my attention to social and emotional learning was directly related to my students' developing English skills, and the corresponding rise in their standardized test scores. My belief is reflected in many other studies which link attention to SEL with improved academic performance. "Study after study has demonstrated that such social skills as independence, attention, persistence to task,[and]

self-control, ... all correlate highly with grades and academic test scores (Elias, M. & Clabby, J., 1992) In the case of the Improving Social Awareness-Social Problem Solving Project, students in their last two years of elementary school participated in an intensive program to promote social competence. In a follow-up six years later, researchers found that students who participated in the project demonstrated higher instances of positive pro-social behavior and lower levels of anti-social, and self-destructive behavior. Statistics also showed that the students performed better on the CTBS standardized achievement exam than students in the control group. (Elias, M., Gara, M., Schuyler, T., Branden-Muller, L. & Sayett, M. 1991)

Leaving No Child Behind

I teach in a nation whose government's educational platform is to "Leave No Child Behind." I teach in a school system whose motto, "Children First", heads all official memos and school communications. These slogans are bold, hopeful, and, in some ways, revolutionary. But until the social and emotional needs of students are recognized, honored, and incorporated into the very fabric of school, we are not putting children first, and we are leaving many children behind.

To ignore students' social and emotional needs is to ignore the reality of their lives in a challenging world. Too many of our young people (not only those new to the country) are not equipped with the skills to meet the negative challenges of our society in a positive way. Nationwide self-destructive and violent behavior in students is on the rise: school shootings, teen suicide, school drop-outs. Schools attempt to address these social challenges through assemblies on racial tolerance, drug abuse, AIDS, conflict resolution, or sexual education, bringing in motivational speakers to inspire, frighten, or dissuade kids. But if these assemblies are not supported by a deeper, consistent daily framework or philosophy of meeting students' social and emotional needs within the

classroom and school community, they will be ineffective at changing behavior.

Children will continue to be left behind.

In an article titled, “Connectedness Called Key to Student Behavior,” published in the Washington Post, 12 April, 2002, Michael Fletcher reported that students who view their schools as supportive communities are less likely to engage in destructive behaviors. In the largest study of its kind to date, a federally funded survey of 72,000 junior high and high school students found that in smaller schools where teachers foster strong relationships with their students and help them feel like valuable contributors, students feel more connected to their schools and to the people in them. These students are less likely to engage in risky behavior like drug use, violence, or early sexual activity. These students are less likely to be left behind.

The Risk of High-Stakes Testing

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 relies heavily on high-stakes testing as a means of raising student achievement and improving student motivation. Under this legislation, teachers and schools are held accountable for students’ performance on standardized exams, mandated to be given annually in grades 3-8. Student promotion and retention is based on the ability to pass the exams, and school funding is linked to increases in test scores. Evidence increasingly shows that while high-stakes testing policies may raise test scores on the mandated exams, attaching rewards and consequences to rigorous tests actually decreases student motivation and increases the proportion of students who drop out of school. In a study of 18 states with existing high-stakes testing policies, Audrey Amrein and David Berliner found that attaching stakes to tests alienates students from their own learning experiences in school because, as the

stakes get high, teachers adopt a less student-centered teaching approach and are less likely to encourage students to explore subjects and concepts that motivate them. (Amrein and Berliner 2003, 32) Ironically, students who drop out of school are not necessarily the lowest academic achievers. (Kellaghan et al., 1996, 23) They may just not want to be a part of a system that coerces them into inflated concern over test scores. They may sense that standardized testing is not in the best interest of their learning.

Of course schools should ensure that students are able to achieve in the basic skills, and schools should be held accountable for the job they are doing in educating students. But the need for academic accountability must be understood within the broader *social* context of education. According to educator Chip Wood in his book, *Time to Teach, Time to Learn*

To ignore this is to ignore the reality of school. Many areas in education need change, but we must establish a hierarchy of these needs to make the changes effective and lasting....No matter how knowledgeable teachers are about content curriculum, instruction cannot be delivered in classrooms where children are unfocused, inattentive, and struggling with each other instead of helping each other. Teachers must know how to create “trustworthy spaces” for learning before that learning can occur. This is not easy, quick, or formulaic, but it must be done. We must address the social context of school as we reform academic learning and performance. Without understanding and addressing the social context we are likely to simply keep changing the academic content over and over without seeing the desired results. (Wood, 182)

High stakes testing is undermining the real needs of our students. If our goal as educators is truly to “leave no child behind”, we must support educational policy that recognizes the crucial role SEL plays in successful life-long learning.

Fitting It All In

Why can't every kid have a Passport Partner? Why don't we spend time in every class checking in with students, helping them learn to get along? Why can't every student start the day in a respectful circle? How can we fit SEL into the daily school curriculum? Some may argue that there is not enough time to cover required content area one year, let alone incorporate social and emotional learning. But to integrate SEL into classroom teaching I did not have to stop stop teaching traditional subjects areas of science, social studies, reading, and writing. SEL skills can be incorporated into daily lessons through warm ups, games, reflective questions, journal writing, discussions, role-plays, team projects, and cooperative learning. SEL can also be taught through a separate curriculum in an advisory format. It should be noted that work that meets social and emotional needs can often be tailored to meet district standards in all content areas, including applied learning. In an ideal program, social skills are reinforced consistently as key elements of the school culture of caring. In these ways, SEL programs promote academic achievement by providing a solid, secure springboard for growth.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Lessons Learned: What I Believe to Be True

My revolutionary year taught me many things about the implementation and adaptation of an SEL program. Here are some of the most important realizations:

1. It takes more than one classroom teacher to raise a socially responsible student. The most effective program must extend beyond the classroom, into the hallways, the cafeteria, and outside of the school into the community. The more teachers, administrators, parents and community members share the commitment to students' social and emotional well-being, the more profound and long-lasting the learning will be.
2. The way class time is scheduled can make a big difference in the implementation of SEL. I was fortunate enough to have my homeroom students for a 90 minute block every morning. I saw them again for 45 minutes at the end of each school day. This format was ideal, as we were able to set the tone for the day and wrap things up at the end, debriefing what had happened throughout the day. This format also gave me the flexibility to respond to needs as they came up. If I sensed that the majority of the class was depressed over the prospect of an upcoming holiday without their extended family members, I could switch the science lesson to the afternoon and devote time to a poetry project aimed at loved ones overseas.

3. Teacher presence is essential. In order to respond to the social and emotional needs of my students, I need to be very observant, very aware, very *present* in my classroom. If I am caught up with my own issues and my mind is elsewhere I will not be in a position to read what is happening with my students. As I must model all the behaviors I wish to see in my students, I need to be aware at all times of my own affect--my own way of *being* with my students. When I am fully present in the classroom, I can more honestly subordinate my teaching to their learning.

4. Teacher training programs should offer at least one course in SEL. In reflecting on how critical emotional skills are in the development of happy, productive students, I am amazed that so few teacher training programs address this area as a specific course. The theories and methods of SEL, as well as a solid understanding of the stages and dynamics of group development, should be required course work for all aspiring teachers.

5. Time invested in SEL is not wasted time! By starting their day with a 20 minute routine to focus on their role as classroom community members, my students were well prepared to delve into the academics of the day, more amenable to working together, and ready to support one another in their learning. I found that the class learned more profoundly and efficiently because of the continuing focus on the social and emotional dynamics of the group.

6. The focus must be on the process more than the product. Each step in establishing the Morning Circle routine needed to be modeled and practiced again and again. If I didn't pay enough attention to the modeling phase, the result was superficial and undesirable. I cannot just expect students to know what to do or how to behave--it is the job of the

teacher to break down the behavior into teachable, observable parts and draw attention to the performance of each part.

The Business of Education?

In the morning announcements broadcast daily on the PA throughout the week, our principal often sounded tired. “Out-of-control behavior in the hallways is unacceptable. Those caught throwing food in the cafeteria will be suspended. Students are to respect all adults in the building at all times.” And always the firm reminder, spoken like a mantra, “Macfarland is a place of business, and our business is education.” Our business is education. She means that our business is academic achievement, studying hard, passing tests, scoring high. Though I understood why she insisted on this reminder--it was an attempt to get students to settle down to focus on learning--I always felt the words ring hollow inside.

In the process of writing this paper and documenting my year of experimenting with social and emotional learning, I have come to realize that education is so very much more than a business. The actual teaching and learning involved in true education is so much more than the acquisition of content and skills. Education is an art--a sometimes mysterious, powerful, ever-evolving art that, when approached holistically, can have profound and lasting meaning for the learning community. Academics is only one facet of this art. To be fully realized, social and emotional needs must be part of a sound education, because our social and emotional needs are an integral part of who we are as human beings.

Someday I will teach in a school that understands itself to be not a place of business, but a community of wonder. We will be founded on discovery, love, and respect-- a school where all teachers and administrators have committed to meet students

on their own page-- a school dedicated to realizing the unique potential in each human being. And as we move through the rhythms of the year, reaffirming our connections to one another and our exquisite bonds as a human community, we won't need a reminder on the morning announcements to remember who we are and why we are there. We will already know.

APPENDIX ONE

Passport Partner Game Questions

On Wednesday you will meet your partners and play a question game. Here are the questions the game will ask you and your partner. Can you think of other questions you would like to ask?

Tell us about what you like to do on Sundays. Why?

Tell us about a dream you have for the future. What will you do to make it come true?

Tell us about a pet you would like to have. Why?

Tell us something you like about Macfarland. Why?

Tell us something you don't like about Macfarland. Why?

Tell us 3 things we could do to make this school better.

Tell us about your favorite place in Washington, DC. Why?

What is something that makes you angry? What do you do?

Tell us about your family. Who is very important to you? Why?

Tell us about your room. Do you like your room? Why/why not?

Tell us something you are good at. Who taught you?

Tell us about your favorite food. Can you cook this food?

Tell us about your favorite food. Can you cook this food?

Tell us about your best friend. Why is he/she your best friend?

Tell us about a time you were nervous. What happened?

Tell us about a time you had to make a difficult decision.

APPENDIX TWO

Five Phases of Passport Partner Project

Passport Partners: Project Overview

Phase I: Partner Journal Writing--Getting to Know the “Other”
Phase II: Partner Community Building--Widening the Container
Phase III: Ropes Course Experience--Strengthening the Bonds
Phase IV: Group Projects--Taking it to the Community
Phase V: The Closure Celebration--Looking Back, Looking Forward

Program Goals:

1. Improve ELL’s skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking
2. Develop social skills/cooperative skills across languages and cultures
3. Raise awareness and appreciation of Macfarland’s diversity
4. Build bonds that will foster greater displays of respect and tolerance outside the classroom
5. Provide students the chance to positively affect their community through a community service project
6. Meet America’s choice standards in Applied Learning, Listening and Communication

Phase I: Partner Journal Writing

- goals:
1. introduce and practice social skills of listening, turn taking and processes of pair-work, mini councils and councils within respective participating homerooms
 2. initiate contact with partners through regular written correspondence
 3. sensitize non-native speakers to the challenges facing English Language Learners
 4. introduce students to the project, its structure, expectations, assessment

Description:

In phase one students from an English Language Learning homeroom are matched with native speakers from another class. They begin a written communication through a shared notebook. A basic letter writing format is introduced and modeled, in which students respond to questions asked by their partners, and then ask three new questions of their own. Topics and questions may be generated together as a class, or students may choose topics independently. Students write once a week on themes of interest. Teachers in both classes help students frame questions and construct responses, making note of the issues that arise naturally from the process of correspondence. Teachers review the correspondence every week to keep track of the process and address any conflicts or confusions that emerge.

Students are encouraged to be creative with their notebooks--draw pictures, paste artwork or stickers to personalize them. The focus here is not on absolute grammatical accuracy, but on overall communication. Teachers of the native speakers lead discussions to increase sensitivity to the struggles of learning the English language. Meanwhile, the teacher of the non-native speakers encourages students to share phrases of their own languages with their partners.

Students have not yet met one another face to face, though many may have caught glimpses of their partners and made guesses as to who they are. Students should be growing familiar with the processes of pair work, deep listening, mini-councils and council, and should practice these forms in their respective classes with the guidance of their teachers. Each class should have a strong “container” built before the two groups merge in face-to-face meetings. When it is determined that both classes have the social skills in place to begin to build community together, side by side, the project enters the next phase.

Implementation Questions for Phase I

1. How should participants be chosen? Should participation be optional or required of an entire homeroom?
2. What are some considerations when choosing a partnering homeroom and partnering teacher?
3. Should pairs be heterogeneous or same sex? What happens when someone new joins the class? Will

the partners switch? Do students stay with the same partner the whole time?

4. How will the program's effectiveness be measured? What quantifiable measures can be taken at the beginning and end of the program? Are there different goals for each homeroom class? For each student? How can students set their own goals for the program and self-evaluate at the end?

5. Should the journal writing continue throughout the year? If so, should the format stay the same or should kids switch partners to connect more deeply with someone new?

Phase II: Partner Community Building--Widening the Container

- goals:
1. Continue to clarify purpose and goals of project
 2. Set ground rules and expectations/agreements
 3. Guide students to deeper levels of self/group awareness and respect
 4. Establish respect for boundaries

Description:

Through a series of developed lesson plans, teachers will guide mixed groups of students (ELL's with their partners) to deeper levels of awareness, empathy, and respect. Formats already familiar to students (pair work, council, deep listening) will be employed, providing safe structure for interactions. Topics covered in these combined sessions may have already been modeled and practiced with the ELL's in their own homeroom to ensure greater security and confidence. The sessions will be characterized by a mix of hands-on activity and discussions, ensuring alternative means of expression for non-native speakers and continued high levels of interest for all students. Earlier sessions could last 30-45 minutes, working into a full 90 minute block as levels of comfort increase.

Suggested Lesson Plan Frameworks/Sequence

Lesson One: Introductions

1. warm up: name games/ball toss
2. people bingo (questions are specific to students in class)
3. closure: I like all my neighbors who... (using people bingo themes to help ELLs)

Lesson Two: Introductions

1. warm up: name games/ball toss
2. snakes and ladders/questions board game (students draw a question and answer before moving on board. option to pass and draw another question. questions are not too personal or revealing)
3. closure: What's something you learned that you and your partner have in common? How did you learn you are different? (worksheet for writing/recording responses)

Lesson Three: Group Agreement

1. warm up: sing someone's name using three syllables
2. coming up with group agreement with symbols for each element
3. design class coat of arms or flag using symbols

Lesson Four: Life Symbols

1. warm up: match the word to the symbol
2. 20 objects: how does this object symbolize your life?
3. closure: draw a picture of your object or something that represents you, add to a patchwork mosaic to hang in the class

Lesson Five: Friendship

1. warm up: balloon circle

2. describe your best friend
are you a good friend? Why/why not?
What qualities do you look for in a friend?
Have you ever been anywhere where friends are treated differently?
3. closure: song, Stand By Me

Lesson Five: Feeling left out

1. warm up: read story "The Brand New Kid" about being new and foreign on the first days of school
2. discussion: a time in your life when you felt left out; how did you deal with it?
3. closure: Trust game: blindfolded in the circle

Lesson Six: Loss

1. warm up:
2. discussion: a time in your life when you left something behind (change, moving, leaving friends, leaving family); what do you miss? What did you gain? What helped you during this time?
3. closure:

Lesson Seven: Theme--Fear

1. warm up: Calvin and Hobbes cartoons about childhood fears. make up words to put in bubbles or match captions to cartoons
2. discussion: What are you afraid of? What's something you used to be afraid of but aren't any more? How did you cope with childhood fears? How do you cope now?
3. closure: mime circle--act out something you're afraid of, others guess what it is

Implementation Questions for Phase II:

1. What's the relationship between the partners once the group starts to meet as a whole? Do they first discuss the idea with their partner and then bring it to the larger circle? Do they regularly have "cosmic dates" with their partners throughout the process?
2. Should circle themes be first introduced in respective classrooms and then approached in mixed council circles? Should students first write about issues in passport books to develop vocabulary around the themes? How much preparation/scaffolding will the ELLs need to feel comfortable participating equally with more vocal mainstream kids?
3. What are the implications in council of having 6-8th graders mixed? Does the appropriateness of some themes change with different ages?
4. In what ways can music and shared songs, drama and role play, teaching of sign language, bring the group together?

Phase III: Ropes Course Experience--Strengthening the Bonds

- goals:
1. to apply skills of cooperation and respect outside of classroom setting
 2. to stretch limits and challenge ourselves as individuals and as a community
 3. to gain insights into ourselves as leaders/styles of leadership
 4. to address issue of fear at deeper level and support one another in facing fears

Description:

Students will participate in an overnight ropes course/ team-building program. In preparation for the expedition, discussions on fears, pushing limits, and qualities of leadership will be held. At the program site, Passport partners will work together to solve a variety of physical team challenges. Partners from mainstream class will be responsible for making sure their ELL partners understand everything that's going on during the session by checking in with them regularly. Each challenge will be followed by an analysis of the experience and discussion of leadership styles. Back at school, students will reflect on the experience and consider what they learned about their own leadership styles and strategies for problem-solving and team work, as well as how these strategies can be carried over into other areas of life. Students may choose to design a mini-adventure course for another homeroom, complete with debriefing for a group project in the following phase.

Implementation Questions:

1. How will the leaders of the ropes course make accommodations for ELLs?
2. What work can be done in class to best prepare students for the field trip?

Phase IV: Group Projects--Taking it to the Community

- goals:
1. to apply cooperative learning/ social skills to a real-life project
 2. to internalize themes/ideas explored through passport partners program
 3. to demonstrate new learning in the form of a community project that raises awareness and builds community outside of the classroom
 4. to identify themselves proudly as passport partners who will take their new skills and understandings with them into the larger world
 5. to offer the opportunity, through an applied learning project, to meet the America's Choice Applied Learning Standards

Description:

In this phase, students take stock of the skills they have developed and how far they've come. They brainstorm what ways they might share what they've learned with their school community. In groups of 4 (two pairs of passport partners) they come up with a project outline and a time line for the project's completion. They research the materials they will need and estimate the cost. Each team can be allotted a budget, based on funds available, or they can design a fund raiser to finance their project. Assessment criteria for the projects will be determined by the group with the help of the teachers. Projects will be displayed, performed, unveiled, on a special project day open to the community. Publicity for the event will be handled by the students themselves.

Questions for Implementation:

1. How much influence should teachers have in shaping the students' projects?
2. Do students have to work with their original partners or can they choose their own groups at this point?
3. How will the projects be assessed?

Phase V: The Closure Celebration--Looking Back, Looking Forward

- goals:
1. to provide sense of closure to the program and school year
 2. to model healthy goodbyes
 3. to identify practical ways to put new understandings into practice
 4. to evaluate the program's success for future
 5. to share and celebrate our program and its goals with family members, business leaders, community members and encourage future classes to participate

At the end of the year, students will be honored in a school-wide celebration (perhaps held the same day as the exhibit of student projects). Community members, parents, peers, teachers will be present to recognize the achievements and contributions of the group. Volunteer students will speak to the audience, sharing what they learned in the passport partners program and how they will carry these lessons into the next grade. Eighth graders will be given special recognition, as they will now be taking what they learned on to high schools.

Questions for Implementation:

1. Which elements of the closure should be held privately within the group itself, and which elements should be publicly performed/recognized?
2. How can participants from this year's program help advise the partners next year? What active role can they continue to play?

APPENDIX THREE

Student Samples from Passport Partner Journal

Dear Chanel. (Tynesha)

My name is Luz Velasquez, I was born in El Salvador on September 12-1990. On my free time I like to draw or talk with my friends.

I like to eat pizza

I have one year of been here.

My country flag is of blue at the top, white at the middle and blue at the bottom, and a coat at the middle of the white color.

I move from El Salvador to here on mars 3-2002. I'm in the 7th grade.

Okay Chanel I have some questions for you:

- ① What kind of music do you like? why?
- ② What is your favorite movie? why?
- ③ What colors do you like? why?

4-28-03

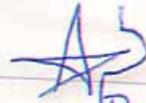
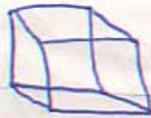
Dear: Suz

I am very happy that you had that picture for me so I can show my family and friends what you had made me on your time. I am glad that you are my writing partner so we can talk about things. How is school coming along? are you getting good grades on your reports? My french teacher had told me that we are going to see each other pretty soon.

I have 2 questions for you Suz

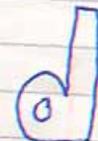
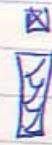
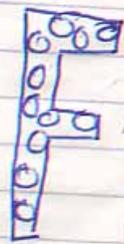
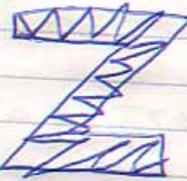
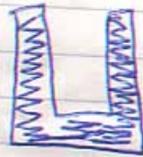
- ① What kind of job you would want in the future?
- ② What do you miss about ~~your~~ ~~country~~ country?





By Char
of
Tyne

To: LUZ.



HP my friend!

6-8-03

Today was a crazy day for me. I didn't know that you have class with ms. Joyner in 6-7 period do you see me in class I don't know who are you.

I hope that we will have fun in the party. I have a nickname it is ~~LiA~~ but I cant tell you what that means. I have questions for you.

1. Do you have a nickname?
2. Do you like Macfarland M.S?
3. How do you feel when your friends gave you a hugs?

See you!

Dear: L.A

Thank you for the picture. I like your nickname that you have. I have one 2 my nick name is Nesha. Every one call's me Nesha some times in school but, every one around my house call's me that name every day. I think I know what your nick-name stands for, Do it stands for your whole name. My ~~name~~ name is Nesha because of Tynesha but you have to take out the Ty.

I have some questions for you L.A

- ① How many bestfriends do you have.
- ② Can you make just ~~1~~^{1#} more bubble letter in my nick name.
- ③ Can you what unteal school is over
- ④ I will sin you a picture of me but don't tell know body.

APPENDIX FOUR

Passport Partners Survey and Results

Passport Partner Participation Survey

Thank you for participating in the Passport Partners Program this year! This was the first year of the program, and we would like to hear your feelings about it. We would especially like to know how we could make the program better for next year. You do not need to put your name on the survey.

Please indicate the degree to which you *agree* or *disagree* with the following statements by circling a number 1-5.

1= strongly disagree (NO)

2= disagree

3= not sure

4=agree

5= strongly agree (YES)

1. I learned a lot about my passport partner. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I understand more about my partner's culture. 1 2 3 4 5

3. I liked writing in the journals. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I liked reading what my partner wrote. 1 2 3 4 5

5. My partner asked interesting questions. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I asked interesting questions. 1 2 3 4 5

7. It was hard to think of questions to ask. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I felt uncomfortable meeting my partner for
the first time. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I wish I could have done more activities with
my partner. 1 2 3 4 5

10. I will talk to my partner if I see him/her in school next year.
 1 2 3 4 5

11. Having a passport partner changed some ideas I had about other cultures.
 1 2 3 4 5

12. I will talk to my partner (or say hello) if I see him/her on the street this summer.

13. Having a passport partner should not be required for everyone in the class. Only students who *want* a passport partner should have one.
 1 2 3 4 5

14. Having a passport partner has made me more interested in other cultures.
 1 2 3 4 5

15. The passport partner program could help reduce violence in the school.
 1 2 3 4 5

16. The passport partner program helps people respect each other more.

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. My passport partner and I have a lot in common. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 18. My passport partner is very different from me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 19. I liked having a passport partner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 20. I would do this program again if I could. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

How do you feel about this program? What should we do to make it better?

Passport Partner Participation Survey Results

Results were averaged for ELL and Mainstream (MS) groups. Those scores showing a difference of greater than .5 are noted with a star.

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling a number 1-5.

1= strongly disagree (NO)

2= disagree

3= not sure

4=agree

5= strongly agree (YES)

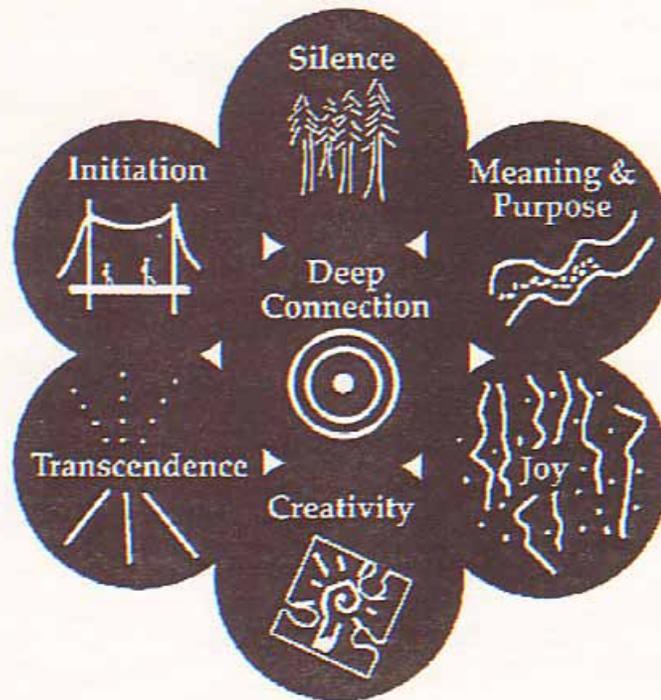
	MS	ELL
1. I learned a lot about my passport partner.	3.75	3.38
2. I understand more about my partner=s culture.	2.47	3.38*
3. I liked writing in the journals.	3.33	3.
4. I liked reading what my partner wrote.	4.41	3.63*
5. My partner asked interesting questions.	4.	3.38*
6. I asked interesting questions.	3.88	4.
7. It was hard to think of questions to ask.	4.13	4.25
8. I felt uncomfortable meeting my partner for the first time.	3.25	2 *
9. I wish I could have done more activities with my partner.	3.6	4.5
10. I will talk to my partner if I see him/her in school next year.	3.4	3.5
11. Having a passport partner changed some ideas I had about other cultures.	3.07	3.5
12. I will talk to my partner (or say hello) if I see him/her		

<i>on the street this summer.</i>	4.	3.75 *
13. <i>Having a passport partner should not be required for everyone in the class. Only students who want a passport partner should have one.</i>	4.27	4.13
14. <i>Having a passport partner has made me more interested in other cultures.</i>	3.27	3.38
15. <i>The passport partner program could help reduce violence in the school.</i>	4.31	3.14 *
16. <i>The passport partner program helps people respect each other more.</i>	4.79	3.29 *
17. <i>My passport partner and I have a lot in common.</i>	3.2	3.29
18. <i>My passport partner is very different from me.</i>	4.13	3.14 *
19. <i>I liked having a passport partner.</i>	3.93	3.86
20. <i>I would do this program again if I could.</i>	3.53	4

APPENDIX FIVE

Seven Pathways to the Soul of Education

Seven Gateways to the Soul in Education



1. **The yearning for deep connection** describes a quality of relationship that is profoundly caring, is resonant with meaning, and involves feelings of belonging or of being truly seen and known. Students may experience deep connection to themselves, others, nature, or a higher power.

2. **The longing for silence and solitude**, often an ambivalent domain, is fraught with both fear and urgent need. Respite from the tyranny of "busyness" and noise, silence may be a realm of reflection, of calm or fertile chaos, an avenue of stillness and rest for some, prayer or contemplation for others.

3. **The search for meaning and purpose** concerns the exploration of big questions, such as "Why am I here?" "Can my life have a purpose? How do I find out what it is?" "What is life for?" "What is my destiny?" "What does my future hold?" and "Is there a God?"

4. **The hunger for joy and delight** can be satisfied through experiences of great simplicity, such as play, celebration, or gratitude. It also describes the exaltation students feel when encountering beauty, power, grace, brilliance, love or the sheer joy of being alive.

5. **The creative drive**, perhaps the most familiar domain for nourishing the spirit in school, is part of all the gateways. Whether developing a new idea, a work of art, a scientific discovery, or an entirely new lens on life, students feel the awe and mystery of creating.

6. **The urge for transcendence** describes the desire for young people to go beyond their perceived limits. It includes not only the mystical realm, but experiences of extraordinary in the arts, athletics, academics, or human relations. By naming and honoring this universal human need, educators can help students constructively channel this powerful urge.

7. **The need for initiation** deals with rites of passage for the young -- guiding adolescence to become more conscious about the irrevocable transition from childhood to adulthood. Adults can give young people tools for dealing with all of life's transitions and farewells. Meeting this need for initiation often involves ceremonies with parents and faculty that welcome them into the community of adults.

APPENDIX SIX

Selected Resources for Implementing SEL

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Selected Organizations Promoting Social Emotional Learning

Northeast Foundation for Children/Responsive Classroom
www.responsiveclassroom.org
publishes a free newsletter
1-800 360 6332

The Passageways Institute
57th St. Boulder, CO 80301
303-581-0221
infopassageways@aol.com
www.mediatorsfoundation.org/isel