Part III
Schools-Based Best Practices
The most reliable way to improve schools is to improve curriculum and instruction and to improve the conditions in which teachers work and children learn, rather than endlessly squabbling over how school systems should be organized, managed, and controlled. (Ravitch, 2010)

In many ways it seems as if we have been arguing about what and how teachers should teach since the turn of the last century (Kleibard, 1995). Today, we are dealing with the effects of the past decade of the No Child Left Behind legislation while diving headfirst into the age of the Common Core State Standards. We hear politicians bark, see districts react, and feel the impact of teachers and children left in the middle trying to figure out how to make sense of it all. At the Developmental Studies Center (DSC), we have spent the past 33 years struggling with how to help schools navigate these turbulent waters. We researched how to best support the academic, social, and ethical development of our young people. We investigated how to foster children into the principled, thoughtful, engaged adults we hope them to become.

In the first edition of this book, my late colleague Vic Battistich described the origins and evolution of the Child Development Project (CDP), DSC’s first endeavor to support student’s positive social, moral, and academic development. (Battistich, 2008). This chapter picks up where Vic left off by tracing the pedagogical development of DSC into a broader and more expansive model of instruction. What we have developed as a result of this journey represents a path schools can take to support the full needs—academic, social, and emotional—of the children they serve.
A PORTRAIT OF OUR STUDENTS

At the writing of this chapter, 45 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). With so many states adopting, and with such high stakes tied to their implementation, any discussion of teaching and learning must certainly include mention of them. While controversy surrounds how these standards will be implemented and assessed, one of the helpful elements they provide is a compelling portrait of the learner who is college and career ready. The standards state that, “As students advance through the grades and master the standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language, they are able to exhibit with increasing fullness and regularity these capacities of the literate individual” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Through mastery of the standards students:

- Demonstrate independence;
- Build strong content knowledge;
- Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline;
- Comprehend as well as critique;
- Value evidence;
- Use technology and digital media strategically and capably;
- Come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

While these are certainly valuable skills that are necessary for twenty-first century jobs, this portrait seems incomplete if we are to truly support our children as they grow into adults. To capture a more comprehensive portrait of our students, my colleagues and I often begin our work with teachers with a visualization activity. We have them picture the young girl jumping rope in the schoolyard, or the boy who comes in to class a few minutes late every day. We then ask them to project that image forward 15 years or so and try to see that student as a community member, neighbor, soldier, manager, lawyer, health worker, politician, and parent. Then we ask them to create a picture of the skills, qualities, and traits that student needs to possess, in order to be ready to tackle the myriad roles and responsibilities they will inhabit. The list often contains words from the CCSS portrait above, but it also contains words such as, empathetic, caring, resourceful, engaged, principled, focused, passionate, gritty, creative, reflective, hard working, problem solver, resilient, etc. This picture represents a more complete hope-filled representation of our future. This image serves as a beacon keeping the work we do in schools focused on the ultimate outcomes we desire.

Teachers are ultimately responsible for both images from above. They need to ensure students master the rigorous academic standards, but they also need to help them develop, the other, what the author Paul Tough calls “non-cognitive” skills (Tough, 2012). Moreover, these skills are essential for students’ eventual success in life. Our emotions, skills, experiences, and knowledge all work together in one package. Unfortunately, in many settings these non-cognitive skills are not nurtured together but seen as separate discrete things. This is problematic because it is not like students leave their emotions on the shelf above the coat rack outside the classroom. Instead, they come into our rooms as whole bodies possessing full hearts and minds. Supporting and nourishing the whole child
must therefore be at the heart of the work of schools. Since its inceptions, the Developmental Studies Center has focused our research, teacher professional development, and curriculum development on this mission—fostering students’ academic, social, and ethical development.

NOURISHING THE HEART AND MIND

This concept of educating the “Whole Child” is not a new one. John Dewey was arguing for something similar in the early stages of the last century (Dewey, 1938). More recently, the influential non-profit organization ASCD launched the Whole Child Initiative in 2007. This ambitious initiative defines this work as, “Each child, in each school, in each of our communities deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. That’s what a whole child approach to learning, teaching, and community engagement really is” (ASCD, n.d., “The Whole Child”). Due to ASCD’s efforts there are signs that policy makers are beginning to lend their support for this effort. In Arkansas, for example, the governor recently signed a bill into law promoting Whole Child Education (ASCD, n.d., “Arkansas Governor Beebe Signs . . . ”).

In addition to the work above, there is also a growing body of research demonstrating that expanding schools’ focus to include social and emotional learning greatly benefits student development (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013). Indeed there is evidence that students actually increase academic achievement because of this implementation of SEL programs (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

The difficult thing for schools is not deciding whether or not to include social and emotional learning with the academic curriculum. The challenge is trying to figure out how to do it.

PEDAGOGY FOR THE WHOLE CHILD

DSC’s pedagogy, which integrates academic and social development into curricula for teachers, was formed over the past 33 years of research and experience in schools. It has its roots in DSC’s first program the Child Development Project (CDP) but has evolved greatly since then. This evolution of our pedagogy comes from close analysis of our own work in schools as well as the context schools are working under.

As we examined the data from our six-district study of CDP for example (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000), we learned that while there were positive program effects in the high change schools, effects that persisted even into middle school (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004), we were still frustrated that the program was not more fully implemented by all of the schools in the study. Additionally because of the pressures of testing and of high stakes accountability (especially after the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Legislation) we have seen a reduction of class time for anything other than what is tested (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). Thus, in many schools teachers don’t feel they have the license to focus on the social and emotional development of children.

A review of our own research by DSC’s founder Eric Schaps led us to believe we needed to revise our current offerings and expand programming into the most focused upon academic subject area of schooling—literacy. In his review Dr. Schaps found that a
revised CDP program, with its expanded reading-skills instruction, will be more responsive to students’ academic needs and more feasible for a wide range of schools to implement. And we believe it will continue to enhance students’ sense of community in school and to yield the wide-ranging, enduring benefits that follow from such a focus.

(Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004)

Because of this and other analyses, DSC revised CDP and created new reading and writing programs.

Our current programming now includes a reading comprehension program *Making Meaning: Strategies that Build Comprehension and Community* (Developmental Studies Center, 2008); a writing program, *Being a Writer: Craft, Conventions and Community* (Developmental Studies Center, 2007), and a classroom and schoolwide community building program, *Caring School Community* (Developmental Studies Center, 2009) (this is a revised version of CDP). Taken together these programs illuminate a path schools can take to focus on educating the whole child. The core principles of the pedagogy (which is contained in the programs above) provide schools with a blueprint for deepening academic learning while supporting students’ prosocial development. These core principles are:

- A caring, safe, and supportive learning community;
- Academic instruction is integrated with social and ethical learning;
- Students are intrinsically motivated;
- Learning situations are organized for students to do the thinking.

**A Caring, Safe, and Supportive Learning Community**

There is much evidence that creating a safe and supportive community provides enormous benefits for children both socially and academically (Durlak et al., 2011; Schaps, 2005; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). School climate also plays a critical role in why some schools are more successful than others (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). When students experience school as a safe and supportive place they reap some powerful outcomes including:

- Reduced aggressiveness, violence, delinquency, and drug and alcohol use;
- Increased social competence and positive behavior;
- More concern for others;
- Stronger connection to school and higher educational aspirations;
- Increased academic motivation and achievement.

(Learning First Alliance, 2001)

An evaluation of DSC’s community building program *Caring School Community* (Marshall & Caldwell, 2007) found similar results. In that study the program schools showed:

- Safer learning communities
- Increased staff collaboration
- Improved classroom strategies
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• Improved student discipline
• Improved academic achievement.

In our work with schools DSC builds caring safe and supportive environments through the following ways.

**Teambuilding Activities**—Each year begins with teambuilding activities that get students talking and interacting with one another. These activities are designed to help students get to know each other, bring students together around a common purpose, and start the process for building a caring community. Activities help students:

• Learn each other’s names
• Get to know one another
• Stay connected with one another.

Teambuilders might be done after long breaks, when new students arrive in the classroom, or when seating arrangements change.

**Class Meetings**—This is the core component of the program. Through class meetings students can plan for upcoming events or make decisions on how certain classroom activities might be run. They are also valuable places for students to solve problems and handle conflict. Class meeting topics might include but are not limited to:

• Preparing for a new student or a guest teacher
• Planning a study trip
• Setting classroom norms
• Discussing bullying, teasing, and fighting
• Discussing playground challenges.

**Cross-Age Buddies Program**—Our buddies program helps build caring relationships across a school. These may be academic or recreational activities. The activity helps older and younger students take a responsibility for their role in the relationship and teaches them valuable interaction skills.

**Homeside Activities**—This collection of activities is designed to stimulate conversations between the students and their family and to connect home and school. Every activity begins in the classroom, continues at home, and then ends back in the classroom. The activities are designed to give students an opportunity to share their school lives with their family and their family life with the school.

**Schoolwide Community Building Activities**—This component helps link the students, parents, teachers, and other adults in the school. The activities focus on building relationships and reinventing traditional schoolwide activities.

Taken together, these program components help teachers establish a caring climate for their students. They also provide the opportunity for students to learn valuable social skills necessary to grow and interact with one another.

**Academic Instruction is Integrated with Social and Ethical Learning**

DSC’s curriculum is designed around the idea that social and academic development are interconnected. In a typical day in school, students have to negotiate with each other in a wide variety of circumstances. They work together constructing a science experiment,
sharing math manipulatives, discussing books with partners, and growing new ideas for their writing. All of these subject areas lend themselves to explicit teaching of social skills and are full of opportunities for reflection on behavior. Moreover, integrating social and academic development provides students with the opportunity to develop their social skills in the context of their academic work. This provides authentic reasons to teach, reinforce, and reflect on the social skills students need to work in groups, in pairs, and to share their thinking in whole class settings. The researchers Stephanie Jones and Suzanne Bouffard have postulated that social and emotional learning done in isolation only has had generally modest effects. Integrating social and emotional learning into the academic curricula may be necessary in order for SEL to have a significant impact on student development (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Integrating this work, however, needs careful planning in order to be thoughtfully integrated into the curriculum (Brunn, 2010). In our lessons we suggest teachers do this in three key ways:

- **Ensure lessons have both social and academic goals**—Most programs contain learning objectives. These are essential to planning effective instruction. We take this a step further. In addition to having academic objectives, our lessons also include social objectives. In a reading lesson, for example, an academic objective students might be using evidence from the text to justify their opinions about what was read. The social focus for the same lesson might involve students using prompts to learn to agree and disagree respectfully.

- **Add partner work and group work when appropriate for the academic activity**—Not every lesson has places for students to interact or opportunities for them to work on social skills. If we want students to see the efficacy of the social skills they are learning, then they need authentic opportunities to use them. In the example above, the teacher knows that if students are learning to justify opinions using textual evidence, then there will be opportunities for students to challenge each other’s thinking. This text talk provides the opportunity to not only deepen the academic learning, but also provides a real context to learn how to agree and disagree respectfully.

- **Structure lessons to include social skill instruction and reflection**—Having a predictable time in each lesson to teach or reinforce a social skill ensures that social and emotional learning does not get pushed out of the curriculum. With so much content to cover, teachers feel pressed to get the entire curriculum covered causing social development to be left out (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). We structure our lessons so that the first part of every lesson either introduces a social skill or reinforces a skill that has already been taught. At the conclusion of each lesson, the teacher then asks students to reflect on how it went that day (Schaps & Brunn, 2008). So if they are working on the social objective agreeing or disagreeing respectfully, the teacher might ask, “What was challenging about having a different opinion than the group (or their partner)?” Or, they might ask, “What worked today when we tried using our prompts?”

Having intentional social goals allows us to scaffold students learning over time. We can introduce the appropriate social skills when they are most relevant in the curriculum. Students see the utility of using the skills instead of de-contextualized skills learned in isolation.
Intrinsically Motivated Students

Anyone who has ever assigned a piece of writing to students knows how important intrinsic motivation is. The writing of a student who is simply going through the motions, just to comply with the teacher’s requirement looks much different than the writing from a student who is committed to expressing her idea and actively trying to move the reader. Intrinsic motivation is therefore an essential part of DSC’s work in schools. It is critical because, as Larry Ferlazzo relates, “This kind of motivation drives students to put effort into learning because they see that it will help them achieve their personal goals” (Ferlazzo, 2013, p. 3).

It can be tough for teachers to embrace the idea that, no matter how good their lessons are; the student decides what, when, and if, they will learn the desired content — learning happens within the child. Intrinsic motivation has a great deal to do with this. Luckily, there is much schools can do to impact the level of their students’ internal motivation. We have learned that when students’ basic needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence are met their level of engagement rises (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Schaps et al., 2004). At DSC we attempt to meet these needs in the following ways:

- Autonomy—In reading, for example, students get to choose books by favorite authors and in genres they have strong interest in reading. In writing, students learn to choose their own topic, formulate their unique opinions, and get to share their writing in meaningful purposeful ways. In DSC classrooms, students also have a voice in solving classroom problems while getting opportunities to plan key events and making decisions on classroom procedures.
- Belonging—Through teambuilding, class meetings, buddies activities, and lots of opportunities to interact with classmates in academic lessons, students develop a sense of connectedness to school.
- Competence—By providing an engaging and developmentally appropriate curriculum, students get opportunities to develop skills, and to challenge themselves.

Learning Situation Organized For Students to do the Thinking

John Dewey once asked, “How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them?” (Dewey, 1938, p. 15). Even though he wrote this almost 75 years ago, the question seems appropriate even for today’s students. The fact still remains that how students experience the instruction in our classrooms makes an enormous difference in their engagement and in their learning.

If we are to shift students from the passive role of receiver of information, and toward an active role of investigator, then teachers must shift their teaching “stance” (Brunn, 2010, p. 72). This shift in stance involves moving into the role of facilitator of student thinking. When student thinking is put at the center of our instruction, it means that teachers talk less and students talk, write, and do more. The facilitator’s role involves doing the following:

- Listening carefully to student thinking
- Asking open-ended questions
- Using cooperative structures
- Probing student thinking
- Utilizing wait time
- Using non-judgmental responses.
In addition to the points above, supporting student thinking means valuing mistakes. If we are doing our job as facilitators, we are presenting many challenging and complex problems and ideas for students to wrestle with. This means that they will make lots of mistakes. These mistakes are essential for student success in school. As Eleanor Duckworth says, “What you do about what you don’t know is, in the final analysis, what determines what you will ultimately know” (Duckworth E., 1987, p. 68).

The challenge, however, is that most students do not value mistakes. In most schools only right answers count. Many of us suffer from this fixed mindset and carry with us the notion that making mistakes is somehow wrong (Dweck, 2006). If, however, we are to put student thinking at the center of our lessons, then we must change this paradigm in our classrooms. We need to set up experiences where students struggle and have to work through that struggle. There is evidence that students benefit greatly from persevering through difficult mistakes and working on a problem over time. Staying with a difficult task may be what separates students who excel and those who don’t. Angela Duckworth calls this trait “grit” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007).

The programs at DSC are designed to support teachers in shifting into the stance of a facilitator. We have found that with scaffolded materials support along with in-classroom professional development, teachers can put student thinking at the center of their instruction.

**CONCLUSION**

Since 1980, the Developmental Studies Center has developed programs, and conducted professional development in schools across the country in order to better foster students’ academic, social, and ethical development. We know that attending to the needs of the whole child is an essential yet difficult task in the tempest of today’s educational climate. But, as we have shown in this chapter, there is overwhelming evidence that creating safe and supportive environments, and integrating social and emotional development into academic instruction, significantly benefits students. We have also shown that there are concrete steps schools can take to do this work.

We know this will be challenging. This is especially true as districts develop and implement new teacher evaluation systems, and as they implement the new Common Core State Standards assessments. In order to best meet the needs of their students it will be imperative that school leaders stay the course outlined here and not marginalize social and emotional learning.

This can be done through the careful selection of educational materials and continued support of job-embedded professional development for teachers. Through the use of reflective, teacher-led models of professional development, school systems can empower teachers to be more responsive to their students and better prepared to support their social and academic development.

**REFERENCES**


