

Creating A School of Belonging

Version 1.0

In a School of Belonging, daily academic and social stressors are managed effectively because people are conscious of their thoughts, actions and words about and toward others, are given opportunities to help others, and build bonds of acceptance instead of barriers of rejection

-David Levine

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Purpose of this book

This book is a companion to A School of Belonging (SBL) Process. In addition to this book, The SBL Resource Kit includes *Lessons for A School of Belonging*, The music CD *Friendship is Coming*, the DVD *Through the Eyes of Howard Gray*, and *Creating a School of Belonging Community of Practice*.

What is A School of Belonging?

A School of Belonging (SBL) is a professional development initiative that focuses on social and emotional culture building. SBL Training facilitates an exploration of the most effective ways to engage students by implementing diverse teaching methods while creating an emotionally safe school free from bullying and other low-level forms of aggressive behaviors. The fundamental belief of an **SBL School** is that all members of the school population deserve to feel connected through the cultivation of helpful and positive relationships. The starting point for this connection is listening for it is only when we listen to our students that relevant and meaningful learning takes place.

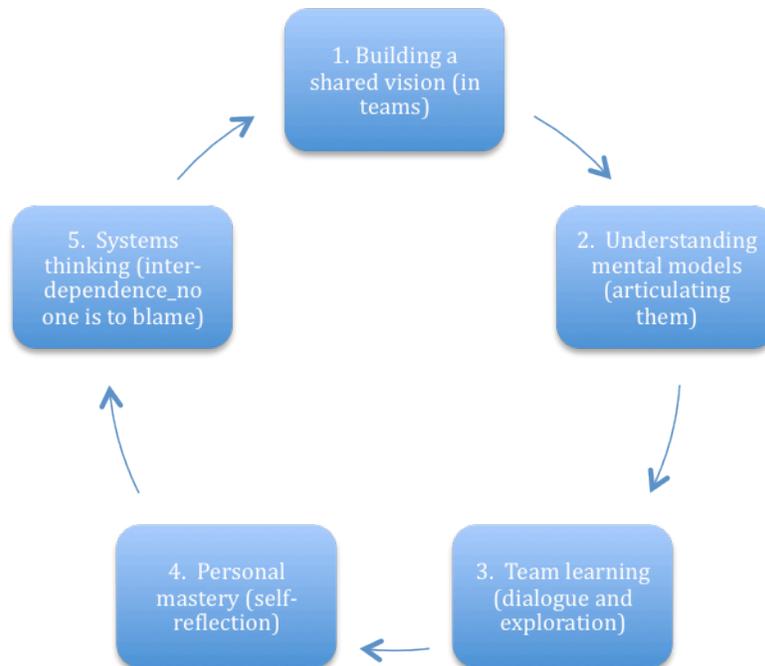
Many teachers I meet feel the weight of multiple initiatives hanging over them. Each day it seems another binder is handed to them with another required approach or list of material to present to their students. Over time, emotions run high and ragged and it can feel like June in October. A School of Belonging is intended to facilitate a return to the joy of teaching and learning and it is done systematically. It is not a program or series of activities but a way of listening, responding and moving together toward a place of quality education that links social and emotional learning to student achievement.

A School of Belonging is a process to create a culture that embraces social and emotional learning as a cornerstone for a healthy learning organization. An organization has many parts that must work harmoniously for the greater good of a healthy, vibrant and effective whole. The vision of a healthy learning organization and how A School of Belonging aspires to attain such status was inspired by the work of Peter Senge. Peter is a warm, passionate, caring and gifted writer and teacher and his landmark book *The Fifth Discipline* in which he presented “five learning disciplines” for an ever evolving

healthy learning organization is what motivated me to do the systems work that lead to the SBL Process.

The Five Learning Disciplines

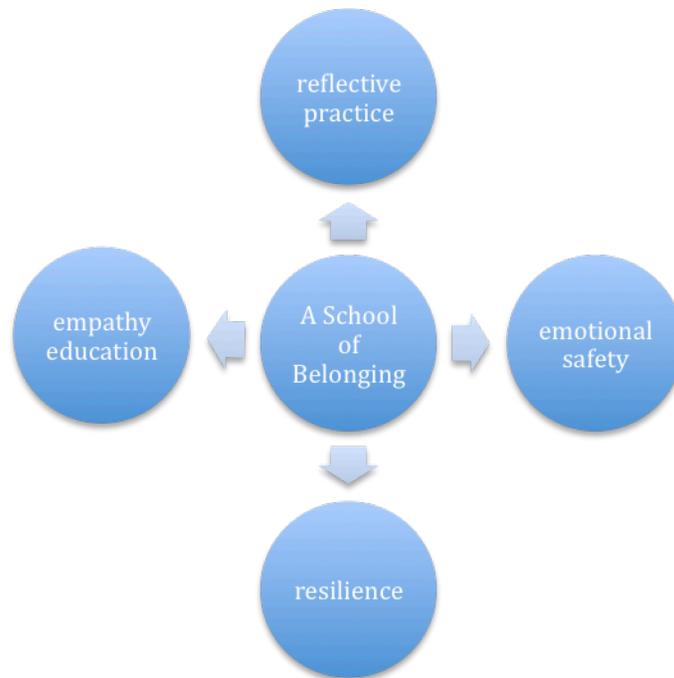
(Peter Senge)



It is only when a learning organization has all of the parts working together, that healthy change and high levels of achievement will take place.

Senge's five disciplines are woven into the SBL Process as it relates to creating an emotionally safe learning environment. If this process is to succeed, all staff members must be conscious of their thoughts, actions and beliefs and ask the difficult question as to whether they are "culture carriers" or "initiative blockers". This is part of what Dr. Senge would call the need to "suspend one's assumptions and beliefs" in order to reflect on what is best for the school and inevitably for the student.

A School of Belonging culture building process is anchored in emotional safety, resilience, empathy education, and reflective practice.



As you work with this book, each component is presented as its own learning session:

Session 1. Emotional safety

Session 2. Resilience,

Session 3. Empathy education

Session 4. Reflective practice

You can use this book to follow along as you work with an SBL consultant during an **SBL Initiative** or you may wish to use it as a self-study guide for creating emotional safety in your classroom and school. Work with each session slowly and reflectively and dialogue with your colleagues if possible formally in a study group or informally during the school day. The more you talk about these ideas, the more they will become part of your consciousness and that is how effective culture shift takes place. If an SBL initiative is effective, the learning environment will feel emotionally safe and student achievement will rise.

Session 1

Emotional Safety

A Blueprint

Emotional needs
Avoid/Enjoy
Needs seeking behaviors
A memorable teacher
What do kids need to succeed?
An assessment tool

Application

A Technique

- The Classroom meeting

A Process

- The Inside Classroom

Reflection

References

Emotional Safety

A Blueprint

Often the idea of safety within a school conjures up images of single points of entry, nametags, sign-in desks and zero tolerance for fighting or other violent acts. These images focus solely upon physical safety. In *A School of Belonging*, the articulation of a child's emotional needs provides us with a blueprint for emotional safety.

The four emotional needs are:

1. Acceptance: attachment to the group and school community
2. Competence: having one's gifts and sense of purpose named
3. Voice: being listened to, feeling trusted and offering ideas
4. Engagement: feeling excited and joyful about discovery and learning



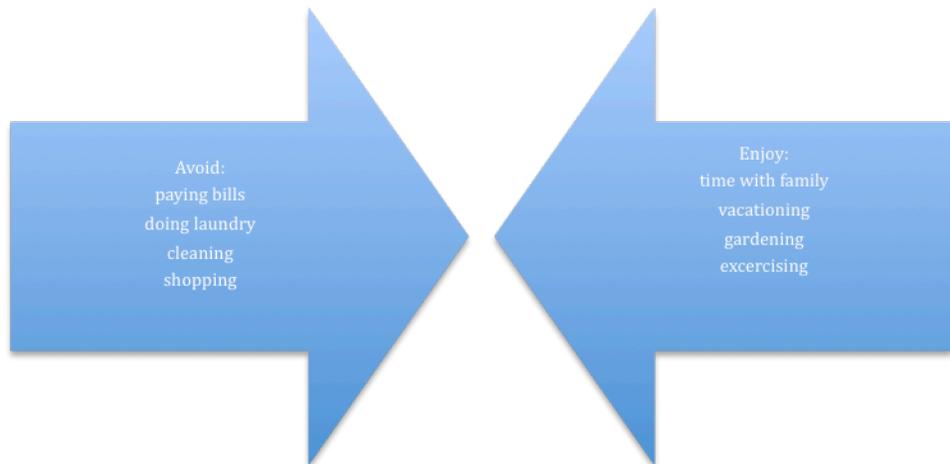
Avoid/Enjoy

Think about all of the things in your life that you would avoid doing if you could.

Now think about all of the things in your life you enjoy doing.

What is the difference?

The Avoid list contains tasks you are forced to do; you have no choice while the enjoy list is filled with things you want to do, creating a very different emotional response than when you have to do them.



In an [SBL School](#) there is a consciousness around creating a culture that is needs focused and non-coercive.

Needs seeking behaviors

Behavior is a form of communication and it is our challenge to decode a student's behavior to understand how best to respond. Behavior is often motivated by seeking to get a physical or emotional need met.

If for example, you missed a meal, were in a learning situation, and suddenly realized how hungry you were, you would not be able to concentrate on the lesson (even if you were really into what you were learning). Instead you would be fixated on “ I have to get something to eat.” This is true for any **physical need**. If a need is unmet, it is difficult to be focused and present. That is why we feed our students breakfast and lunch if their families cannot afford to do it for them.

The same is true for an **emotional need**. When an emotional need is unmet, motivation will be low, often resulting in anti-social behaviors.

If, on the other hand, emotional needs are met, this is what psychologist and educator Dr. William Glasser refers to as **The Quality World**: The collection of pleasurable memories that we accumulate during our life. (Glasser, 1990, pp, 58-59.) A School of Belonging in its most effective form is a quality world experience, meaning that it is meeting the emotional needs of the students and staff-it is emotionally safe.

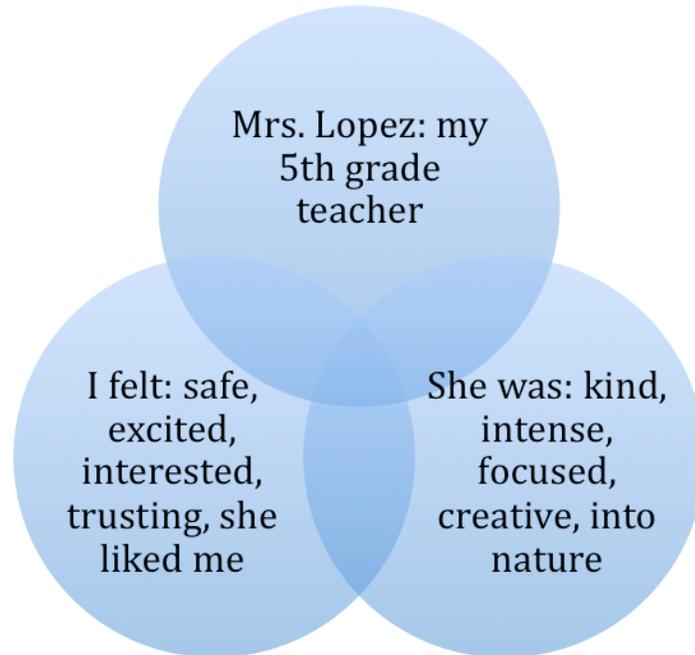
My friend Karrel Greene teaches high school English in Sacramento, California and I once asked how Dr. Glasser explained The Quality World to her, (he worked in her class while writing his book The Quality School). Repeating what he did for her, she drew a happy face with a dot in the top region of the circle. She told me each student has a point of connection and our first goal should be to find that point and connect to it. This is what it means to establish rapport. something all caring teachers do naturally.

A memorable teacher

Think of a memorable teacher, coach, mentor etc... from your childhood who had a positive impact on your life.

How did you feel in that person’s presence?

How would you describe that person?



As you reflect on this person, ask yourself how she has impacted your life today. The person you are thinking of is a [Quality World Person](#) meaning she met your needs, helping to create a positive and hopeful learning experience. This is a foundational component of [A School of Belonging](#): a place where a student's needs are intentionally met.

What do kids need to succeed?

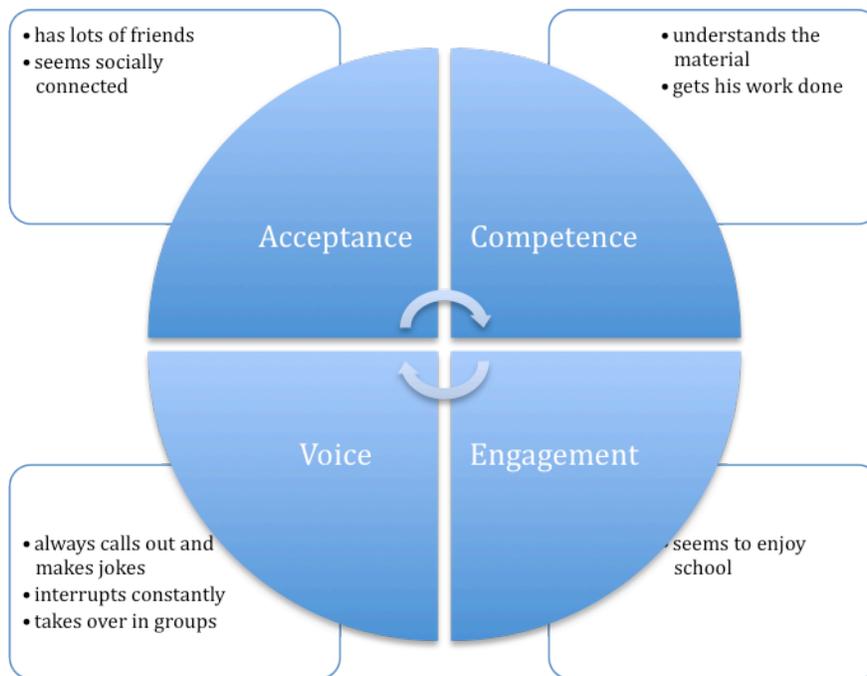
As we near the close of this session on emotional safety, it is a good time to reflect on the students with whom you are currently working or will be working with soon. Ask yourself the question: What do kids need to succeed? You might first want to articulate what is meant by success and this will guide your answers.

What do kids need to succeed?

Most of your answers will align themselves to one of the emotional needs. If you said for example *they need to feel a sense of achievement*, that could be re-framed as *they need to feel competent*.

An assessment tool

As you work with your colleagues to articulate the causes of behaviors, you can use the four emotional needs as an emotional map. Emotional mapping establishes a dialogue about a student in which you can efficiently and effectively identify an unmet need and an accompanying needs-based intervention strategy.



Voice is defined as being listened to, feeling trusted and offering ideas, so it seems as if this student needs to know that his answers are valued and that the teacher appreciates his presence in the classroom.

This is a place from which to start in creating a management plan for the disruptive classroom behavior. It also focuses on the unmet need and not on the personality of the child.

Application

A Technique:

The Community Meeting

What is it?

A community meeting is an open forum in which students can share their thoughts, feelings or ideas about a classroom topic or issue.

How is it used?

A community meeting is used to set a tone within the group, practice social skills, and to gauge where the class is in relationship to whatever issues are ongoing.

How do you run one?

Students are seated in a circle with the following guidelines:

1. one person speaks at a time
2. no side conversations
3. speak for "I" not we and state your name
4. honor all views (do not judge them)

Once everyone is in place, present the rules and explain that a community meeting provides the class with the opportunity to talk about how things are going in the classroom. Everyone has the option of speaking but not all have to. It's really a chance to speak and be listened to and to understand where others (including the teacher) are coming from.

Once you explain the purpose and present the guidelines, you can "open" the meeting. There will be periods of silence and initially this will feel awkward but it is part of the process and let the community take care of itself; someone will eventually speak.

When you feel that the class is ready to move on, you can "close the meeting" and it will officially end.

Specific purposes

1. prepare the class for a task at hand (a new lesson, a class project)
2. allow participants to give and receive feedback about work in process
3. allow class members to share concerns about something that has happened
4. help students review learning
5. allow students to share positive outcomes from working together (Levine, 2003, pg. 59)

A Process:

The Inside Classroom

Brainstorm with your students any or all of the following questions:

- What is it like to be chosen for a team at recess or in gym?
- What is it like not to be chosen or chosen last?
- What is it like to be invited to a friend's birthday party?
- What is it like not to be invited?
- What is it like to be on the home team for athletic or academic competitions?
- What is it like to be on the visiting team?

Summarize their responses on the board, and then ask students to compare the two lists. Ask students where they would rather be and why. Then ask them to name specific guidelines for creating a classroom where everyone feels invited, chosen, at home, and "on the inside of the circle" rather than outside of the group.

Create a poster of the "inside" classroom guidelines, and hang in a prominent place. (Levine, pg. 17, 2006)

Reflection

In this session we covered the following:

1. Emotional safety is articulated by the four emotional needs:
 - a. Acceptance
 - b. Competence
 - c. Voice
 - d. Engagement
2. A student's behaviors reflect an unmet emotional need.
3. When a need is met, that is a Quality World Experience.
4. Everything moves from the need for acceptance and belonging.

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Session 2

Resilience

Managing Life's Challenges

The comb will bend

Protective factors

Pro-social skills/ anti-social behaviors

Social learning

A social skills teaching template

Application

A Technique

- The Fishbowl

A Process

- 2 X 10

Reflections

References

Resilience

Managing Life's Challenges

As children travel through the journey of childhood, they will face both predictable and unpredictable difficult life situations. Often these situations deal with the unknown: entering kindergarten or moving into middle/high school are prime examples. It is within transitional periods such as these when a child's emotions are most vulnerable.

Our work is to predict what the difficult points will be and strategize how best to guide our students in managing the multitude of difficult life situations. The other side of managing a situation is to simply cope.

To cope is to "deal with" which is passive.

To manage is to "maneuver through" which is active.

In this session, we will explore how to create the conditions for resilience as we teach the pro-social skills necessary for managing life's challenges.

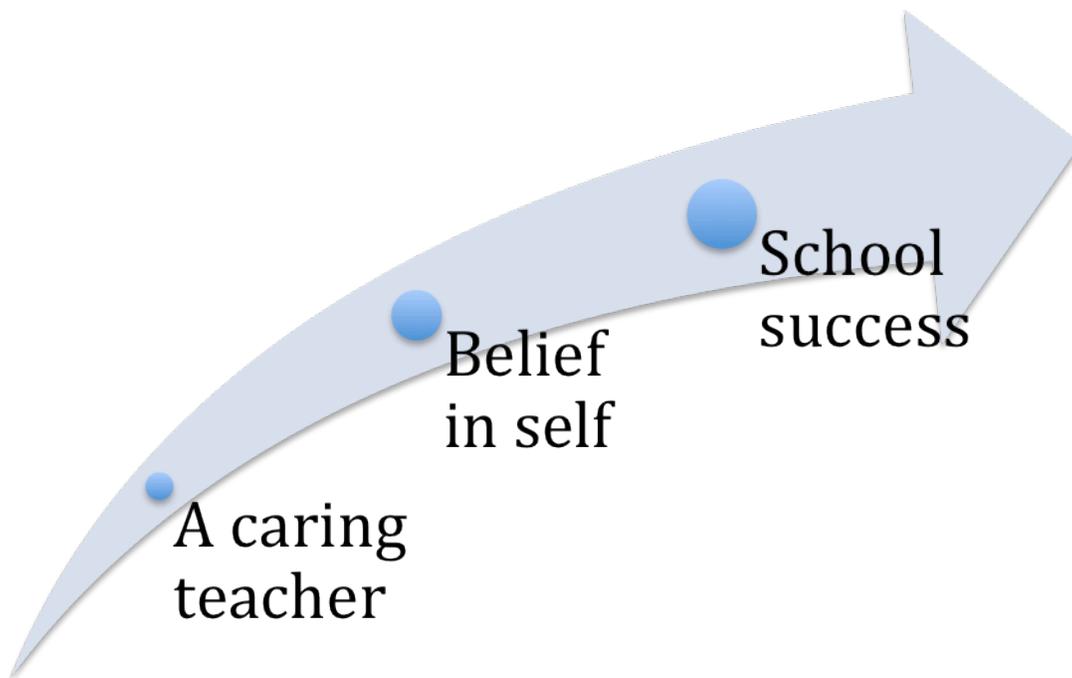
The comb will bend

If you were to take a comb, one of those small black ones, held it on each end and bent both sides down, you would be met with tension from the center of the comb. If you then, let each side go, the comb would spring back to its original form and in doing so would be showing its resilience. That's what resilience is, to have the ability to spring back to one's original place even after a stressful event.

Human development professor and child psychologist Emmy E. Werner in her work on resiliency refers to protective factors (Werner, 1989, p. 106). A protective factor is an "individual or environmental safeguard that enhances a youngster's ability to resist stressful life events and promote adaptation and competence leading towards future success in life" (Garmezy, 1983, as cited in Bogenschneider, Small, & Riley, 1991, p. 2). Dr. Werner calls these successful people resilient; despite the presence of multiple risk

factors at an early age, they are able to demonstrate the attributes of a person with "self-righting tendencies" (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 202) with the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social competence, despite exposure to severe stress (Werner, 1989, pp. 106-111).

Literature on resilience often makes the point that when a teacher believes in a troubled child, that teacher invites the child to believe in him or herself at a time when the child may feel that no one does. [A School of Belonging](#) is staffed with significant adults who consciously pave the way for their students' new life trajectories- and who help students learn how they can believe in themselves and each other as they become equal members of the school and classroom culture.



The life trajectory of a resilient student

Protective factors

Just as the blueprint for emotional safety is made up of the four emotional needs, the blueprint for resilience is made up of **The Protective Factors** to which Dr. Werner referred. In her book (co-written with Dr. Ruth Smith) *Overcoming the Odds*, Dr. Werner articulates that the more protective factors present in a young person's life, the greater the chance for resilience. In simple terms, she describes a resilient child as one who "works well, loves well, plays well expects well."

There are two types of protective factors: external and internal.

External protective factors act as buffers to the difficulties or challenges which exist in a young person's life.

Some of the external school protective factors are:

- A caring teacher
- Exposure to models and mentors
- An encouraging school environment that enhances a child's competencies and belief in self

The process of intentionally creating an emotionally safe learning environment, one that is needs based and non-coercive, is the process of creating a **protective factors school culture**.

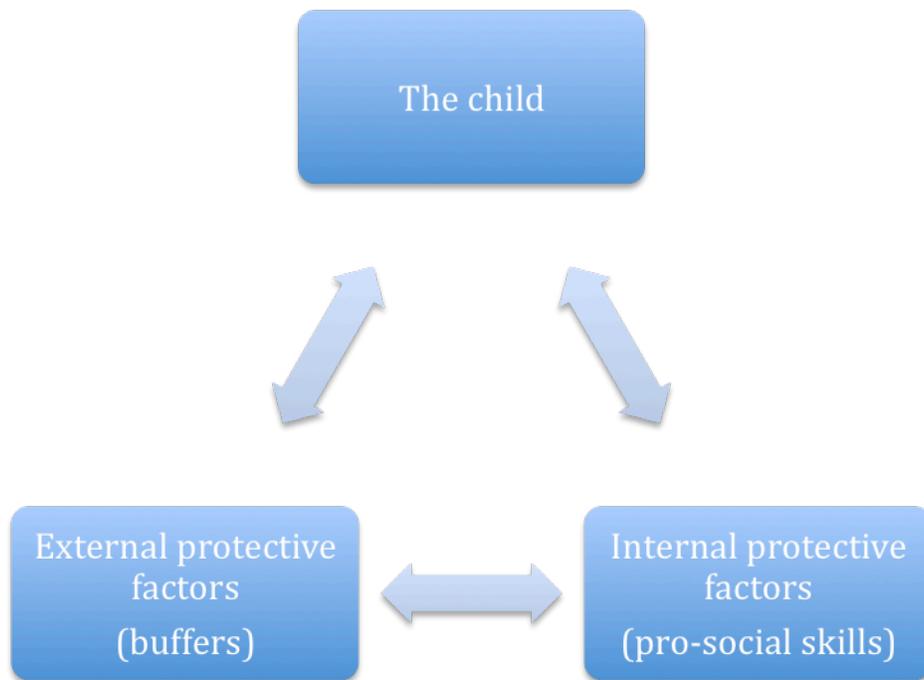
Internal protective factors can be summed up in two words:

Pro-social Skills

A socially competent student is capable of doing such things as asking for help, joining a game, inviting others to play, working in small groups, and feeling compassion for others. Dr. Werner refers to pro-social skills as "The Great Protectors".

Some additional internal protective factors are:

- Positive peer relationships
- A sense of independence
- A sense of purpose
- Participation and involvement
- School success

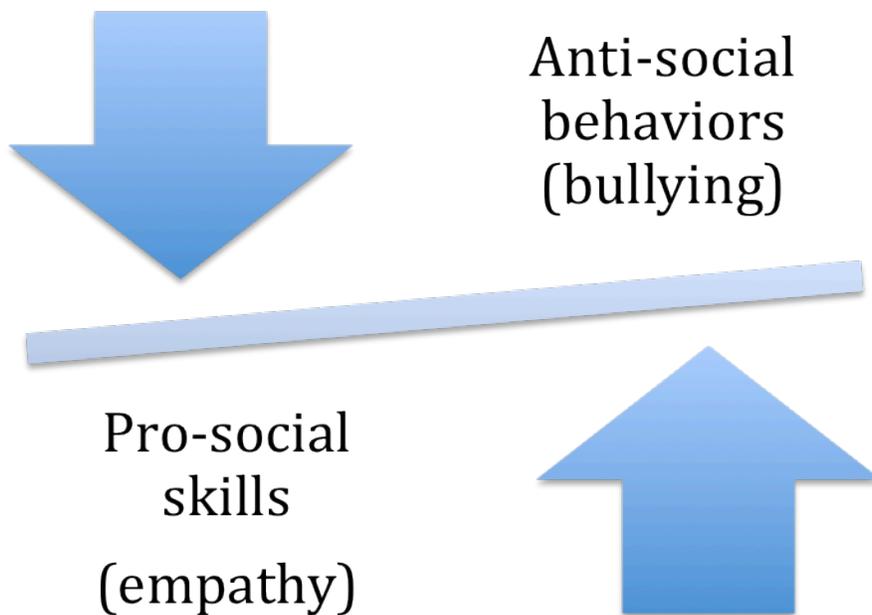


The presence of both external (environmental) protective factors and internal (self-regulating) ones, helps create a sense of equilibrium in the life of a child.

Pro-social skills/anti-social behaviors

In session one it was pointed out that behavior is a form of communication. When a student does not have the **pro-social skills** to manage a difficult life situation and is feeling the stress of feeling less *powerful* than his peers, **anti-social behaviors** such as bullying, will surface. Bullying or victimization is defined as:

...when a person is being exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons (Olweus, 1991)



In *A School of Belonging*, behaviors are not labeled but addressed as forms of communication. Bullying and other low-level forms of aggression are dealt with therapeutically with compassion through high-level listening through what Nicholas Long (one of the co-creators of Life Space Crisis Intervention), refers to as a strength-based intervention. A strength-based intervention utilizes the student as his or her own resource, trusting that with support, non-judgmental listening and guidance, and practice, that person will learn how to better trust his moral compass and intuitive voice while in the throes of a difficult social decision.

If our desire is for students to alter their behaviors, we must teach replacement behaviors (what alternative social choices are available). This will not only minimize bullying in school but also prepare them to manage the challenges they will face in the future. These replacement behaviors could also be called high-level pro-social skills.

What do you think are the five most important pro-social skills to teach your students?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

In *A School of Belonging* there are five primary pro-social skills embedded into the process.



1. Listening: students are often told to listen but not taught how to listen. As with any new skill, listening needs to be broken down into its various components, presented, practiced and modeled. A high-level listener maintains eye contact, is conscious of non-verbal responses, asks questions and summarizes. A listener is focused upon the other person and does not talk about himself.
2. Empathy: *the ability to understand how another is feeling and then to act on what you perceive* is an operational definition of empathy. It can be named for your students and practiced, by imagining what specific characters are going through as you are reading a story, conducting a social studies lesson or intervening in a conflict situation between classmates. A process for teaching empathy is taught in session three.
3. Self-responsibility: responsibility can be presented as respond-ability: *the ability to respond*. Framed in this way, you can teach your students to devise a “response plan” for many of life’s challenges such as cleaning their room, studying for a test, or doing homework. When responsibility is seen as something you have control over it becomes more of a challenge than something you have to do.
4. Solving disagreements with others: conflict is a natural part of life and something which students do not always have the skills to manage. The combination of listening, empathy and self-responsibility or regulation, serve as the platform for conflict management. When practiced and recognized, students will more often than not work through their disagreements without needing an adult to help them.
5. Goal setting: this needs to be specific, real-life and reachable. I have seen too many goal setting exercises that were general and unclear. When a student is able to articulate his or her short-term goals, this articulation clarifies the end point, providing a specific destination. I have been presenting goal setting in context of leaving a legacy in which students are able to see how their actions reflect upon how people see them. Legacy provides a sense of purpose, helping to create meaningful goals.

Social learning

Two highly effective approaches for teaching social skills are:

- Role playing
- Modeling

Role playing engages the students in dialogue, reflection and demonstration and is often a favorite learning method (especially at the middle school level). During a role play, students are presented with a difficult real life social situation and they must determine what the best pro-social choice would be. One example might be how to tell a classmate that you were invited to a party when you know your friend wasn't. This situation rings true and infuses the skills of empathy, listening, self-regulation and assertiveness into the process.

What are some typically challenging social situations your students face on a daily basis?

This list should provide you with a roster of role play scenarios to present to your students. The relevance of role play is that it teaches students how often they know what is best for them and others as they figure out their place in the social dynamic of the class, grade or school. Three conditions of resilience, self-confidence, perspective and hope, grow out of role play practice.

Modeling

The Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura is a foundational theoretical component of A School of Belonging. Children do not learn their social behaviors through trial and error but through imitation. As a teacher, a successful practice in teaching pro-social skills is to model them your self. If we want our students to be understanding, we must be understanding. If we want them to quiet down, we will not have much success if we yell at them to be quiet. Instead, in a quiet tone of voice, we could ask them to quiet down.

One critical application for social learning theory and bullying is to **avoid sarcasm** with your students. When a teacher is sarcastic, three things happen:

1. It teaches sarcasm as an appropriate way of communicating with another.
2. It puts the student who is the target of the sarcasm on the spot.
3. It creates an unsafe classroom environment for the other students.

A resilient child is also a vulnerable child and we must always be mindful of how we interact with our students. It all comes down to the question: what kind of relationship do we want to build? In the end it all comes down to the wise words of teacher, author, and youth-worker Martin Brokenleg:

Programs don't fix kids, relationships do...

A social skills teaching template

1. Skill: _____

2. Reason for choosing this skill: _____

3. Introducing the skill: What is your framing statement?

4. Modeling the skill: How will you model the skill for your class?

5. Present the guidelines for the skill and identify what they are.

6. Assign students to work in pairs to practice the skill.
Process with the class: What questions will you ask?

7. Homework: Will you assign students to practice the skill at home?

Application

A Technique: The Fishbowl

What is it?

A fishbowl is a communication process that helps develop the students' pro-social skills.

How is it used?

A fishbowl is used to address a classroom issue or concern while integrating numerous pro-social skills.

How do you run one?

Start out with the entire class seated in circle. Run a community meeting focusing on a specific issue. After 5-10 minutes, stop the meeting and invite 6-8 volunteers to sit in a small circle inside the larger one. The inner circle participants are called the fish and the outer circle participants are called the bowl.

As the "fish" interact, the students in the outside the circle, "the bowl", observe, listen and provide feedback at times designated by the teacher.

There are usually two rounds meaning the teacher provides an opening question such as: "why do some students act out when I there is a substitute teacher?" This opens round one and after the fish have talked over this question for a few minutes, the teacher pauses the fish and invites process feedback from the outside circle. This feedback focuses on what was said, who said it and what the tone or mood of the inner circle was.

After this feedback, a second round takes place with a follow-up question such as: "How can we make things better for a sub if I'm ever out?" After a few minutes, stop the fish and invite additional feedback from the outside.

Thank the fish and have them rejoin the circle where the class can now join in the conversation in order to come to closure.

Specific purposes

1. Resolving conflicts (the disputants become the fish)
2. Planning
3. Reviewing what has been learned
4. Exploring classroom issues
5. Practicing listening skills, note-taking skills, and speaking skills.

There are additional nuances to the fishbowl and these can be explored in David Levine's book *Teaching Empathy* on pages 84-89.

A process:

Two by ten

Select a student who is disconnected from the learning environment either socially or academically. For 10 days in a row, provide that child with 2 minutes of uninterrupted one on one time. Make this a ritual and you will notice a change in that child's behavior.

This is known as a micro-interaction in practice and is one of the most meaningful and attainable forms of resilience building. It has often been said that little things are big things and according to the emotional memories that many adults have from their school experiences this has shown itself to be true. Young people will remember specific events when there is an emotion or a strong feeling attached to the event. When adults in the school are conscious of the littlest of moments, these micro-interactions can make all of the difference for the recipient. A micro-interaction is one of the most significant external protective factors for it provides the perception that an adult in the school cares. It doesn't take a lot of time but it means a lot to the student when micro-interactions are part of the norm of the school's culture.

Reflection

In this session we covered the following:

1. Resilience is about optimism, hope and a healthy life trajectory.
2. A resilient person is able to manage difficult life situations rather than coping with them.
3. Protective factors are what make a person resilient.
4. External protective factors focus upon relationship building.
5. Internal protective factors are built through the development of pro-social skills.

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Session 3

Empathy

Emotion is learning

Emotional events
The story of Howard Gray
Spreading Howard's story
Teaching empathy
EEA

Application

A Technique

- The listening wheel

A Process

- Honor Roll

Reflection

References

Empathy

Emotion is learning

I once heard a radio interview with the late college basketball coach Jim Valvano. In addition to being a winning coach, Valvano was a highly sought after public speaker. During the interview, he was asked what it took to be a successful speaker. Without hesitation, Valvano said there are three steps to captivate one's audience:

1. Make 'em laugh
2. Make 'em cry
3. Make 'em think

I never forgot his words and have translated them for my work in facilitating high-leverage and life-changing social and emotional learning experiences for children and adults. It is all about touching the learner's emotions by opening up the heart.



The insights Valvano shared spoke to the significance of having an emotional experience with its accompanying emotional memories and life application challenges.

To **make 'em laugh** is to make a real life connection. Laughter shared between people creates instant connections and openness. The best jokes are the ones that present a unique and humorous view into every day real life experiences. Real life connections create relevance and high-leverage learning.

To **make 'em cry** is to touch their hearts. When people cry, it means something deep inside has been spoken to. This inner response is the beginning of having compassion and empathy for another.

To **make 'em think** is to challenge the learner to take the emotional learning experience and move with it toward a new way of being in the world. A lesson is only as effective as its long-term impact, serving to significantly alter one's life trajectory in new and hopeful ways.

Emotional events

Whenever a young person goes through an emotional event whether it is positive or negative, chances are he will remember that event many years later. When one's emotions are touched, the heart has opened and change on a visceral level will occur.

To emphasize the point that we remember emotional events, think about a time when you were very young (3-6 years old), and you became separated from your parents somewhere in public, (a store, a fair, a movie etc...). Reflect for a moment on that event.

1. How old were you?
2. Who were you with?
3. Where were you?
4. What happened?
5. How did you feel?
6. Are there any other memories associated with that event?

Going through this exercise is an opportunity to internalize the notion that emotion is learning. Whenever we experience an emotional event, we will remember it.

This session is devoted to creating emotionally coded social learning experiences that will imprint your students forever.

The story of Howard Gray

The song [Howard Gray](#) is the bedrock of the emotional training for [The School of Belonging](#). It is utilized as part of the SBL Process numerous times and will be referred to often. Here is the story of how this song entered my personal and professional life and how that entry point has changed my life and the work I do.

In 1986, as I was driving home from visiting my friend and colleague Marsha Brown, through the back roads of Hampton, New Hampshire, I had an experience that would alter my life forever. I was listening to a tape of a song in my car stereo Marsha had just given me. The song told the true story of a boy named Howard Gray who was ridiculed and harassed by his peers because he was poor and not very articulate. Lee Domann, the songwriter, told the story from his point of view as the one who wanted to help this kid in some way but didn't have the courage to do so.

As I later discovered, Domann wrote *Howard Gray* on December 8, 1980, the night John Lennon was murdered outside of the Dakota Hotel in New York City.

I, like many "children of the '60's," grieved the passing of an icon of our generation," Domann writes. "That night, as I thought back on those days, I found my mind moving further into the past. An unexpected memory suddenly emerged. It was that of a classmate from junior high school whom I had been guilty of laughing at as other students ridiculed and abused him. His name was Howard Ray. I had not seen or heard of him in twenty years. A deep remorse came over me. That night I wrote the music and [lyric] to the song, "Howard Gray."

At that time I was living in Nashville, TN, honing my craft as a commercial songwriter. The next morning I looked over the lyric and decided that no one would relate to the subject matter, so I threw it in the trash. A few hours later my wife, Maggie, was emptying the trash and found it. She said it was the best thing I had written and that I

should keep it. She was right.

The song began to get a very positive response at “writer’s nights” along Music Row. It was the only one I had ever written that the audience grew dead silent every time I played it. I decided to change the name to “Howard Gray,” as a gesture of trying to protect the real Howard’s anonymity, though I thought the chances were very slim he’d ever hear it.

Somewhere around 1984 a fellow songwriter, Gary Hall, decided he’d had enough of Music City and returned to Boston, where he was a street singer.”

The tape Marsha had given me was a collection of songs which had been recorded by the same Gary Hall and one of those songs was Howard Gray.

*Most everyone I knew put the whole Gray family down
They were the poorest family in our little Kansas town.
Howard always looked too big for his funny ragged clothes
The kids all laughed at him and Jimmy Jones would thumb his nose
Howard sat across from me in 7th grade at school
I didn’t like it much but mama taught the golden rule
So when the spitballs flew at him I never would join in
I guess that was the reason Howard thought I was his friend
And after things would quiet down sometimes I’d turn and see
The grateful eyes of Howard Gray looking back at me*

Howard Gray

Howard Gay

*Somehow they got their kicks out of treatin’ you that way
Deep down I kind of liked you but I was too afraid
To be a friend to you Howard Gray*

*One day after lunch I went to comb my hair and saw
They had Howard pinned against a locker in the hall
They were pokin’ fun about the big hole in his shirt
They had his left arm twisted back behind him ‘til it hurt*

*To this day I can't explain and I won't try to guess
Just how it was I wound up laughing harder than the rest
I laughed until I cried but through my tears I still could see
The tear stained eyes of Howard Gray looking back at me*

Howard Gray

Howard Gay

*I can't believe I joined them all in treatin' you that way
I wanted to apologize but I was too afraid
Of what they'd think about me Howard Gray*

*From that moment on after I made fun of him
He never looked my way
He never smiled at me again
And not much longer after that
His family moved away
And that's the last I ever saw or heard of Howard Gray*

*That was twenty years ago and I still haven't found
Just why we'll kick a brother or a sister when they're down
I know it may sound crazy but now and then I dream
About the eyes of Howard Gray lookin' back at me*

Howard Gray

Howard Gay

*I've never quite forgiven us for treatin' you that way
I only hope that somehow you'll hear this song someday
And you'll know that I am sorry Howard Gray*

We'll probably never meet again

All I can do is pray

May you and God forgive us

Howard Gray (Lee Domann: 17th Avenue Music)

After listening intently to Hall's version of *Howard Gray*, I sensed how important that song could be in a school setting and within two weeks I learned *Howard Gray* and sang it for my class of 6th grade students. Once we got into the lesson, it was hard to stop. They wanted to keep talking about Howard, why he was treated that way and was the song really true? Over the next month, I was invited to share the song with other students in other classrooms in my school. The impact was immediate and soon, there was a banner hanging in the foyer of our school which read:

There will be no Howard Grays in this school!

Eventually, I found myself singing the song and conducting workshops in other schools and in other states, in classes and workshop settings for students, teachers and parents. Over time, I became known as *that guy who sings Howard Gray*.

Spreading Howard's story

In hopes of making the [Howard Gray Experience](#) accessible to more people, I wanted to record the song and contacted Lee Domann who was delighted that I was sharing his song with the students in schools. With his blessing, in 1987 I recorded *Howard Gray* and released it on a cassette in hopes that many more students (and teachers) would be touched and inspired to make a difference with others through Lee's moving expression.

In 1990, I wanted to take things further and decided to make a music video of the song, so I flew to Nashville to meet with Lee to discuss my idea of making a music video of *Howard Gray*. As Lee and I talked about the emotional power of his song, and of the potential impact a Howard Gray Video could have, he suddenly shared that one month earlier, he had actually found Howard Ray in his home state of Kansas after almost 30 years. Even before Lee had finished telling me the story of their reconnection, I knew that we had to expand the video vision from a musical re-creation of the song into a combination music video/ documentary. Lee agreed.

Although I had never produced a music video, that night, as I lay awake, unable to contain my excitement, I wrote what I later learned was called a video treatment of the

video in my journal. The vision of how the song would be expressed and staged (with student actors and then moving into the real visit), flowed out of me in a matter of minutes and I knew we were creating something that would make a huge difference in the lives of the many young in schools struggling to find their place of belonging.

Four months later, I flew to Lawrence, Kansas, with my videographer friend Tobe Carey. Lee drove up from Nashville and the three of us met at a local restaurant to set up for the shoot the next day. The plan was to have Lee and Howard meet outside the school (where the story actually took place), to go inside, walk through the halls and to settle into one of the classrooms. Once inside the classroom, they would sit across from each other in desks and reminisce about their school experiences.

As we shot the video the next day, it all went exactly as I had imagined. At one point the following exchange took place...

Lee: All the time in my memory I remember trying to be as much a friend to you as much as I could but not knowing how to do that. Did you know that? Did you know that I wanted to be a friend to you?

Howard: No I didn't

Lee: You were telling me earlier that you dropped out of school. Did it have to do with the way you felt?

Howard: The way I was treated and everything, I didn't feel like going to school. I just wanted to stay at home.

Toward the end of the conversation, Lee recounts how he hadn't seen Howard in person for almost thirty years until the day Lee returned home to Kansas for his Dad's funeral. As Lee sat there in the church, he turned around to see Howard walking in to pay his respects. Howard's presence touched Lee greatly and inspired him to write a new ending to the song:

*...I thought we'd never meet again
but at last now I can say
you're a bigger man than I am Howard Gray*

I called the finished video *Through the Eyes of Howard Gray*. The DVD is available for your use as part of *The SBL Resource Kit*.

Teaching empathy

Prior to taping the Howard Gray Video, In early December of 1989, while working as a “visiting teacher” for schools throughout the Northeastern United States, I had an unusual experience with a group of 5th grade students. It was a snowy morning in Portland, Maine, and I was teaching a lesson called “Real life Conversations” in The Longfellow Elementary School, for the Portland City School District. I had just sung *Howard Gray* and I asked the students why others in school were often treated unfairly the way Howard was, and as I turned to the blackboard poised to record their answers, an image of a blank picture frame appeared on the board. Looking closely inside the frame, a word was showing itself to me; capitalized in bold letters I saw...

EMPATHY

I drew a blank frame and wrote the word **EMPATHY** on the inside exactly as I was “seeing” it. I stood there quietly for a moment and then said “Please silently read the word I have written inside the empty frame.” After a few moments of silence, I had a student read the word aloud for the class and then I continued... “Empathy is being able to see inside someone else’s “picture”, understanding what they are going through and making caring choices based on what you see.” Over the next 35 minutes a rich dialogue ensued in which we focused upon compassion for others and the moral dilemmas people face every day over what is the right thing to do. When that lesson ended, I intuitively knew that empathy was to be the primary focus of my work as a teacher, workshop leader and curriculum developer.

In 2005, Solution Tree Press released my book *Teaching Empathy*. Since its release, I have had numerous spirited conversations with colleagues on empathy, often charged with emotion and wonder. I have come away from these conversations with the perception that all people need to be conscious of how to manifest empathy in their own lives. It’s a paradox really, because although empathy seems to be about awareness for others, it’s really about having empathy for yourself, finding what brings you joy and meaning in

your life as an educator, believing that you are here to express your uniqueness to the world through this role, and opening up to what that expression might be.

It really is an ancient concept, that we need each other if we are to survive. Technology in spite of all its magic, instant communication and informational capability, cannot provide the most basic emotional need; real-life human connection. Perhaps this is why there are an increasing number of people who feel cut off or *dismembered* from the human experience. Empathy is a journey of *remembering* to the human heart. It is a core heart skill and cutting edge practice for *reconnection and self-discovery* and it is the essence of The School of Belonging.

EEA

EEA is a three-step process used to teach how to move empathy from a feeling to an action. It reframes the process of listening (asking questions, providing a summary and reflecting feelings) into the steps:

E = Event: Summarize to yourself what happened.

E = Empathy: Imagine how the other person feels.

A = Action: Decide how you can act, with courage and compassion.

Ask students to imagine the following situation:

- The same kid being teased on the school bus every day.

Event: A kid is being teased on the bus.

Empathy: He must feel scared and resentful.

Action: I will sit with him tomorrow.

Post the EEA framework in your classroom. From time to time, have students practice EEA as a class dialogue using a social situation relevant to your class.

Application

A Technique:

The Listening Wheel

What is it?

The listening wheel is a structured experience that is active, fun and memorable.

How is it used?

The listening wheel is used to teach and practice listening and to help students share their thoughts with many different classmates.

How do you run one?

Start out by having half of the class stand in a circle. Then have the other go to the circle and have each person stand behind another person who is already standing. The inside people turn around to face the people behind and you have two circles...an inner group and an outer one. You also have multiple pairs ready to practice listening.

Review the three steps to listening:

1. Asking open-ended questions
2. Clarifying and summarizing
3. Reflecting feelings

Instruct that you will provide a question for each person on the inside group to ask their partner. Once the person answers, the inside people are to continue the dialogue by asking follow-up open-ended questions. They will continue until you stop them which will be done with some type of signal (a hand motion, a slide whistle etc.).

Once you stop them, instruct the listeners (the inside people) to summarize back and share a reflection as in...

*I heard you say you love the morning because that is when you are able to focus the best.
It seems as if you love your alone time.*

After the summaries and reflections, reverse roles as the outside people listen (ask questions), and the inside people respond.

Once both partners have had a turn, rotate the outside circle two places so everyone has a new partner. Ask another question.

Here is a sample sequence:

1. What is your favorite time of day?
2. What is something you do well?
3. What is a concern you have about school?
4. What do your friends like about you?
5. What would you like to be doing 10 years from now?

The Listening Wheel is the process. You can use it for any content (the questions). It is particularly useful and engaging to facilitate when reviewing information from your class, processing an experience, or practicing dialogue.

Specific purposes

1. To practice listening
2. To process classroom lessons or events
3. To help students make connections with different kids
4. To have a novel experience

A process:

Partner Guidelines

After teaching listening to your students, introduce Partner Guidelines. One of the significant protective factors is social skills development and learning how to work in partners effectively, is a protective factors learning experience.

Partner guidelines are presented in five steps which are posted on the wall:

1. Decide who goes first
2. Ask three open-ended questions
3. Share information you learned (summarize)
4. Reverse roles
5. Report out to the class or in groups of four

Once you present this process as a follow-up or application of listening, train your students to follow the guidelines that are posted. Once this becomes a routine, all you will have to say is:

Please get into partners. You have ten minutes (or whatever amount of time you provide).

They will do the rest.

Reflection

In this session we covered the following:

1. When a young person has an emotional event, that event will help shape him for the rest of his life.
2. The background to the song Howard Gray and how it has become the cornerstone for empathy teaching in the SBL Program.
3. Empathy is a highly charged pro-social skill.
4. EEA is a process for teaching empathy through dialogue and role play.

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Session 4

Reflective Practice

An Inside Job

Changing the response
Emotional imprints
Emotional intelligence
Feedback
Dialogue
Resonance

Application

A Technique

- The Check-in

A Process

- Reflective practitioners

Reflection

References

Reflective Practice

An inside job

An SBL School promotes an inner journey by the professionals who teach there. The late Donald Schon, an organizational learning theorist, professor, and author, in his work posited that a healthy learning organization is the outgrowth of reflective practice. He defines reflective practice as “the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning”. The focus on continuous learning is key because it represents the challenge of doing things differently if current practices are not working as well as they could be.

A reflective practitioner will step back mindfully, seeking unique responses to every day challenges and learn from this reflective mindset. The field of education is one of the only professions where practitioners are not provided on a regular basis with opportunities to reflect on their practices and share with their colleagues what they have discovered. In the field of medicine for example, if a discovery is made or a frustration is felt, doctors come together to explore what can be done and how things can be done better, collectively seeking to serve the greater good. This practice might serve to save a person’s life.

Teachers, who come together as *reflective practitioner teams*, might also be saving the life of a student, or at least helping to create a happier and more productive one. Reflective practice is the foundation of a School of Belonging as it serves many functions. Whether in the classroom with students, team room with committee members, or faculty room with colleagues, reflective practice will enhance the quality of the school experience, making it more positive, efficient, and effective. This session will present how reflective practice is infused into the SBL Process.

Changing the response

The first step and probably the most challenging one to take for the reflective practitioner is to look within at our tendencies and the internal struggles we have with students, colleagues and parents. We will start by looking at the relationships a teacher has with students.

Answer this question:

What do kids do that drive you crazy?



This question is framed in this way because there are times when a student's behavior is confusing, frustrating and emotionally draining. It is in these times when it is critical to analyze what responses are not working. In 1987, long before the best selling book *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was created, I heard Jack Canfield, one of its editors, speak at an educational conference in Vermont. In his talk, he presented the equation:

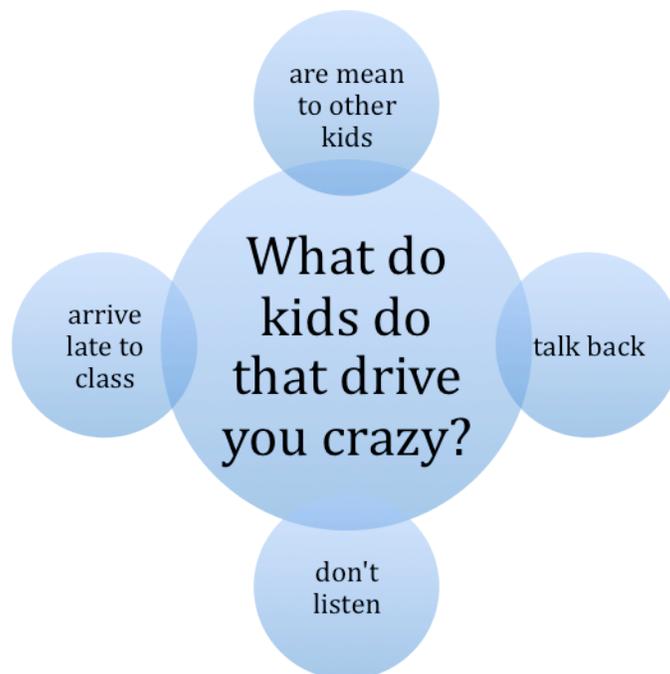
$$E + R = O$$

The event plus your response equals the outcome

This little equation has had great impact on many participants in SBL training experiences. The critical practice is to focus your energies on the **R** of the equation. The only thing that will happen if you try to change the event or blame the event for what is happening is to feel frustration and eventually burnout. It is far more empowering and less stressful to articulate what you have control over in your life.

In the life of an educator, if you can determine what you do have influence over, and focus your emotions there, you will not only be more effective but happier as well. In a School of Belonging, $E + R = O$ is a symbol of the work we do every day: we can make a difference in the lives of our students. What derails us at times is when we take the behaviors of our students personally. Once this happens, our effectiveness wanes and our energy for the work is lessened.

Let's return to the question: what do kids do that drive you crazy?



Driving you crazy is another way of saying that you react emotionally rather than rationally. Emotional reactions to the behaviors that push you buttons can be traced back to some of the personal values that direct our lives.

Emotional Imprints

One's personal values are learned at a very young age from the people and events that surround us. These experiences are known as emotional imprinting and they lay the architecture for the emotional structure of our lives. An imprint, like a tattoo is a forever phenomenon. Imprints are non-negotiable (Edwards) and are most profound in the first 15 years of life. They come at us as value statements or family mores and belief systems. Through the years, our imprints are embedded on our psyche and we are often unaware that they even exist.

An example of an imprint is punctuality. If it was instilled into you that you better be home for dinner on time or you would be in trouble, the imprinted value is that being on time is important and a message that punctuality is a sign of respect. A second imprint from this example is that it is important to eat dinner together as a family. Many years later, this trait of punctuality is a good thing. People know they can count on you as someone who will always be on time. Additionally, if you have a family, you most likely hold the belief that it is important to have dinner together when you can. You place a high "value" on this. However, as with all things there is the other side as well. The polarity experience plays out when a student arrives late to class or hands a paper in late. If your imprint is strong enough you might react from an emotional and irrational place and damage the relationship in the process. It is not about being right or wrong or letting go of the things important to you. More so, it is about knowing not only what is important to you but why you value this so much and even deeper, what are the imprints of your students?

A quick litmus test for what your imprints are is to identify what your buttons or trigger points are. In other words, what do your students do that drive you crazy and in the process makes you react in irrational or destructive ways? This same reflection can be

applied to all of your professional relationships with colleagues, supervisors and parents. If you are unconsciously driven by your imprints, you might not get the desired outcome from your professional relationships.

Again, it is not so much to change your imprints but to make yourself aware of them. Even if upon reflection you reject certain imprints or belief systems from your childhood, in times of stress you often will return to what is most familiar, not necessarily what makes the most sense.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

Emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ) is defined as how a person manages his or her emotions when under pressure. The entry point for developing one's eq is self-awareness of how you respond toward others in stressful situations, in a way that enhances success and happiness in work and life. This takes a great deal of self-reflection and in order to feel safe in exploring new ways of responding, there needs to be the conditions of a supportive and nurturing school culture in which caring, compassion and trust are the norm. When people feel connected within themselves (understanding how they feel and why), and then seek to create empathic and compassionate connections with others, success and achievement will flourish because motivation will be high. EQ in practice helps people have what Dr. William Glasser (see session 1.) calls a needs satisfying experience, one in which a person's emotional needs are being met.

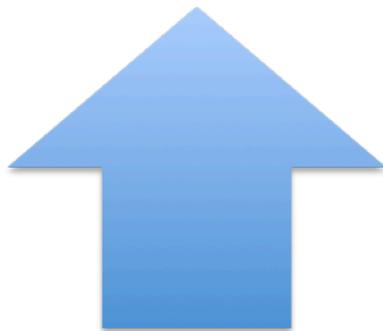
Often, when people think of measuring a person's abilities and performance, IQ (intelligence quotient) is initially what comes to mind. IQ, which on some level is a part of the paradigm of standardization and high stakes testing, lives at the surface in what is often considered to be the hard path towards gaining a competitive advantage: *how smart you are*. EQ, which is sometimes referred to as *how you are smart*, lies beneath the surface, along what many consider to be the soft path. EQ skills are not soft at all but ultimately necessary, not only as a measurement of success but as an entry point to meaningful school, work, and life experience.

SBL staff members are offered the opportunity to take a self-assessment EQ map that was developed by Robert Cooper and Esther Orioli of Essi Systems in San Francisco California. This map takes approximately 30 minutes to take and provides a snapshot of

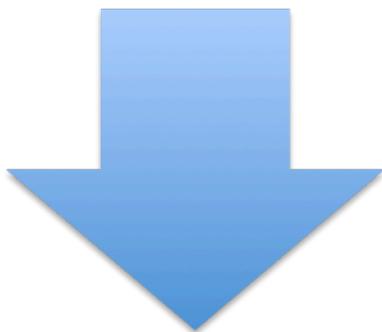
the last thirty days in a person's life. It highlights 16 EQ competencies and helps to identify a person's strengths and vulnerabilities; providing a gateway to managing one's emotions under pressure while becoming more self-aware and skillful with others. An SBL staff member will help you interpret the findings of this your EQ map, helping to gain an advantage over the unwanted imprints that a stressful situation might trigger.

Feedback

Feedback is a critical relationship and community building skill and in its own way, models caring and belonging. Feedback is often confused with criticism or assertiveness but it comes from a very different place, a different intention. The intention of feedback is to help an individual or group grow. It provides information that is observational: what was seen and what was heard and how those behaviors are effecting others, including yourself. It does not judge, label, minimize or threaten. It is logical, specific and useful. There are two forms of feedback: negative or growth feedback and positive or status feedback. Although positive feedback feels good, it is more helpful as far as personal and professional growth goes to receive negative or growth feedback. It may not feel good in the moment but it is important to let a person or group know if what they are doing is counterproductive to a relationship or class experience.



Feedback is: non-judgmental, observational and is intended to help



Criticism: blames, labels, embarrasses, and creates defensiveness

Often, when an administrator, teacher or other staff member gives negative feedback, it is expressed in the form of a “you” message as in: “you are being difficult”. This is not feedback but judgmental and accusatory criticism and often takes place in front of others. Feedback sounds and feels very different as in: “I feel frustrated when you interrupt. It seems as if you are dismissing my ideas. Please let me finish my thought before you share yours.” Tone and volume of voice combined with physical proximity to another is just as critical when giving feedback. If you speak in quiet and relaxed tones, with strong eye contact while giving the recipient some space and boundary, and you deliver the message with a compassionate intention, you will most likely be giving productive and helpful feedback. If on the other hand, your emotions get the better of you, you take the behavior personally and you become angry and upset as you are trying to stop a behavior and you become sarcastic in doing so, the student will most likely shut down, become defiant or escalate in his emotions and behaviors.

A simpler way to look at feedback is that it is a form of high-level listening. When a person is telling you something, the feedback mindset will invite thoughts in non-judgmentally, asking questions to learn more, and summarizing back for clarity and understanding. It is not an audio-tape replay but a reflection of what jumps out at you as the listener. This form of feedback is the essence of what is explored in the next session: Dialogue.

Dialogue

Physicist and scholar David Bohm is where I first learned about dialogue as a group reflective tool. Much like Bohm’s vision that people can demonstrate learning by altering old habits or responses, dialogue helps people challenge their assumptions as they interact and listen to others. MIT professor, systems change specialist and author Peter Senge presents dialogue as a group exploratory process in the book he edited, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (1994). Its purpose is not necessarily to come to an agreement but rather to come to an understanding of all points of view, thereby creating a common thread of connection within the group. This is achieved through high level listening. In high level listening, as a team member (or student) speaks, all others focus on what he/she is saying, following up with open-ended questions. These questions begin with who, what, where, when and how and invite more information. These questions are interspersed with summary statements to clarify for understanding.



A group that practices dialogue has high group emotional intelligence. Many team meetings can rapidly become stressful and dialogue at its best tends to mitigate any interpersonal issues or conflicts that may surface. It is a natural step for the group or class to flow from dialogue toward what Senge refers to as skillful discussion where hard decisions are made and positions are taken. Dialogue as an instructional practice, team process or assessment tool is a cornerstone practice of an SBL school.

Resonance

As educators intentionally build connecting, trusting and safe relationships with their students, in the process they are creating positive, meaningful and everlasting emotional memories for that child as well. If this process of intentional emotional imprinting grew to become a cultural norm practiced by all in a School of Belonging, then all students and staff would feel good about being in school on most days. This positive emotional meter is the demonstration of what some of the literature on group dynamics would call group resonance.

Daniel Goleman and his colleagues in the book *Primal Leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*, define resonance as “a reservoir of positivity that brings out the best in people.” Resonance is not a program or process but starts with an intention that

focuses on the positive energy that flows and the high achievement that is attained, when people in a learning organization honor and trust one another. It's like the feeling a person gets when he or she is standing in the middle of something he loves to do. This could be thoughts and memories of a family vacation spot, a hike to a particular spot in the woods, the look on the face of your child when she is happy, a room in your home where you can find some peace and solace, or when listening to a favorite song or performer.

If a school is a place where resonant moments are the norm, amazing and magical things will happen. Renee Levi who has studied resonance in organizations writes:

...occurrences of resonance between individuals and within groups happen every day in situations in which people come together and experience intimacy and bonding, a felt sense of being in the flow or transcending, personal transformation, and sometimes the satisfaction of accomplishing extraordinary things.

If through the deep connection a resonant experience provides, a school can initiate its students toward their growing edge: where academic learning, social and emotional development, and unique expression is attained, then a *resonant* School of Belonging must be the primary intention for where we want our students to be every day.

Application

A Technique: The Check-in

What is it?

The check-in is a simple form of dialogue that facilitates immediate connection between two or more people who will be working together.

How is it used?

The check-in is used whenever a meeting begins or a class starts. It allows everyone to focus and be present, leaving all stresses “at the door”.

How do you run a check-in?

At the beginning of a meeting or class, provide everyone in the group with an opportunity to state how they are doing as in: *What’s going on for you right now?* or *How are you doing with this new curriculum we are implementing?*

After each person shares, the facilitator or leader of the group summarizes back some of the key points that were shared.

This might seem like a simple technique but it can be extremely meaningful and connecting. Often, when someone shares something they are upset with or they are just not feeling well, that person will feel better for having freed himself or herself of something that was brewing inside. Other times, someone can call for a check-in in the middle of a meeting or class to determine how everyone is doing.

The check-in only takes five to ten minutes and it is time well spent.

Specific purposes

1. To see how everyone is doing
2. To set the tone for the class or meeting
3. To model how important it is to *value the relationship before the task*
4. To practice group-reflection

A Process:

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is a type of focus group that highlights celebration, appreciation and support. Often when staff members take part in an open focus group, the energy quickly spirals downward, ending up in venting, complaining and negativity. The purpose of a focus group, which is to provide an understanding of current realities, gets lost in the pessimistic landscape and people end up feeling bad about their school. A more desired effect comes about by framing the group as a celebration of pride and appreciation for being a staff member in the school. Appreciative inquiry “pursues possibilities” by focusing on the core strengths that exist within a school and its staff. This is an asset approach [as opposed to a deficit approach] and lends itself to positive forward movement where creative planning and problem solving emerges.

Here are some appreciative inquiry openings:

1. Talk about a time when you felt proud about being a staff member of this school.
2. Share a recent success you had with a student.
3. How can we celebrate all that we do here?
4. Share one positive piece of feedback for a person in our group.
5. What next steps can we take?

Appreciative Inquiry by its very nature also facilitates organic team building because it builds bonds of support, acceptance and appreciation.

Reflection

In this session we covered the following:

1. On-going reflective practice drives healthy culture shift. Personal transformation creates systemic transformation.
2. Emotional imprinting from an early age molds the way people see the world and how they react to stressful situations.
3. Emotional intelligence is competency-based, meaning a person can improve their EQ.
4. Working in groups that practice group EQ skills will create quality learning within the group and throughout the school as new ways of operating become the norm.

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