



HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

Social and emotional skills are learning skills

Great teaching, including high-quality professional learning, can render the invisible visible. It can make the implicit explicit. In that spirit, this issue of *The Learning Professional* focuses on a core element of excellent teaching and learning that is not always stated explicitly or afforded time in educators' busy schedules: social and emotional learning (SEL).

In a recent national survey in the U.S., elementary school principals were asked to name their greatest concerns for schools and students today. The 10 most common concerns related to students' social and emotional development. Those needs didn't appear anywhere in the top 10 on the same survey a decade ago.

Whether students' needs have changed or we have simply become more aware of the role of social and emotional factors in schools is a matter of debate. What is no longer a debate, however, is that students' social and emotional development matters, and it cannot be separated from their academic learning.

According to the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, there are at least a dozen specific social and emotional skills that impact learning, from paying attention to coping with frustration to understanding others' perspectives. Increasingly, we are also recognizing that adults' own social and emotional skills impact teaching by influencing

their ability to connect with students, understand students' struggles and motivations, and model the kinds of learning approaches we hope students will embrace.

SEL is more than a program or a classroom management system. It is a mindset and a way of interacting with students and colleagues on a daily basis. That mindset takes time and support to develop fully. Like professional learning, social and emotional development is never done.

The authors in these pages share examples of innovative, impactful professional learning strategies that build educators' capacity to support students' social and emotional skills. Importantly, these strategies make SEL part of academic learning, not an add-on or discretionary program. In this issue, you will find tools for understanding how educators can make SEL part of their ongoing practice and for guiding discussions about where SEL strengths lie and where they can grow.

As I step into the role of editor at *The Learning Professional*, I believe it is fitting that this issue focuses on SEL, not just because it is a topic near and dear to my heart, but because



SEL is fundamentally about building relationships. I am inspired by the relationships I have already begun developing with readers, and I look forward to learning from you and with you. I encourage you to reach out at any time to share your ideas, questions, and expertise.

Social and emotional learning is a core strength of true learning organizations. Organizations that continually learn, innovate, and grow tend to foster trust, enable energetic and respectful dialogue, value differences in perspective, see challenges as opportunities, and prioritize communication. I am honored to be part of such a culture at Learning Forward and to support educators in the great work you do with and for students.

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