

Preface

WHEN ASKED WHY they chose to work in education, most teachers talk about wanting to make a difference in children's lives. They might mention a commitment to social justice, a love of the energy young people spark, or a desire to pay forward the kind of mentoring they received when they were young. Few explain their career choices by talking about fulfilling math standards or nurturing the ability to deconstruct text. These are critical skills, of course, and teachers want their students to achieve them, but usually in service of making a difference in children's lives writ large. Most of them are focused on developing the whole child by teaching them how to persevere in their learning, build relationships, and collaborate with others—whether they put it in those terms or not. According to a national teacher survey conducted for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, more than 77 percent of teachers believe social and emotional skills influence academics, and more than 90 percent say they have an important role to play in the classroom.¹ In another national survey, 78 percent of teachers said it is part of their job to help students develop social and emotional skills.²

This is not just good instinct on the part of teachers. Decades of research confirm that academic outcomes are influenced by the capacity to be calm and focused, to persevere and be resilient, to cope with stress, to navigate

relationships with family and friends, and a host of other social and emotional skills.³ Living in an exciting time of epigenetic research and fMRI scans, we now have an understanding of the brain and the relationship of emotions to learning that validates what effective teachers have always known: learning is a social and emotional enterprise. Studies show that students' ability to focus, calm down, and maintain solid relationships affect their ability to learn.⁴ The practice of excellent teachers has always reflected this.

Around the turn of this millennium, however, schools started becoming inhospitable to whole-child perspectives. Amid well-intentioned efforts to raise the bar for students who have been historically underserved by schools, policies focused myopically on reading, writing, and math skills as measured by standardized multiple-choice tests, eschewing other valuable parts of education. These policies have often pushed out some of the fundamental self-management and social relationship skills—as well as the sense of wonder and curiosity—that students need to achieve and be prepared for life. It is a well-known story that need not be repeated here.

But another narrative is emerging. We have reached a point in research where educators and policymakers can no longer reasonably argue that attention to social and emotional competencies is nice but not necessary. These skills are important enough, in fact, to constitute an equity issue. Children who don't have the self-regulation skills to access instruction and do the work of learning are at a disadvantage in the classroom and beyond. Students who look or sound “different” and become alienated by derisive classmates or an unwelcoming school culture may be denied equal educational opportunities. And at a time when employers cite collaboration and adaptability among the top ten skills they look for in job candidates, to shrug off the importance of social and emotional skills is to underprepare students for economic stability and success.⁵ In fact, fewer than half of high school students in a national survey said their schools were doing even a “pretty good job” of addressing skills like working with people who are different from you, knowing how to solve disagreements constructively, and managing stress.⁶

Likewise, teachers need to come to the classroom with resilience and perseverance themselves. Those who do not are at risk for burnout and attrition, not to mention missing the opportunity to respond effectively to students and

navigate student frustration, low motivation, outbursts, and other threats to academic success. This is particularly of concern in an age when nearly half of all school children have experienced at least one major adverse life event and more than 20 percent have experienced two.⁷ School violence is an all too real threat, with more than one hundred people dying in school shootings in one year alone.⁸ If teachers are going to respond effectively to these needs and stresses, they need to be prepared, beginning with opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions and continuing with skill development and practice.

THE HARD QUESTION: HOW TO DEVELOP SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES?

The hard question, therefore, is no longer *whether* schools should pay attention to social and emotional competencies, but *how to go beyond just good intentions*. Nowhere is that question more urgent than in classrooms. Principals, superintendents, and policymakers have a major stake—and a major say—in how schools approach social and emotional learning. But it is teachers who see and feel the importance of social and emotional skills every day, and teachers who have the most power to nurture those skills while students are at school. Although families will always be children's most important teachers, especially when it comes to social and emotional development, a lot of life happens during the school day—a lot of social situations that happen nowhere else, a lot of opportunities to develop one's voice, a lot of chances for a fresh perspective, and a lot of opportunities for negative messages that can hinder social and emotional development, and therefore, academic success. In short, teachers shape the development of the whole child, whether they realize it or not, and whether they are intentional about it or not.

In recent years, there has been an increasing drumbeat to make that influence more intentional and systematic. The movement is epitomized most recently, but by no means exclusively, by the Aspen National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, a coalition of education, science, government, and private sector professionals advocating for investments in integrated approaches to developing academic, social, and emotional skills.

In our work as instructors, teacher educators, and researchers over more than two decades, we have followed this growing national and international momentum, and had some fortunate opportunities to contribute to it.

But we have not seen an adequate accompanying commitment to preparing and supporting educators to integrate social, emotional, and cultural competencies and strategies into their daily practice. Many teachers do possess these skills, but these important competencies are rarely made explicit or considered part of a coherent professional development pipeline that ensures consistently high quality from one classroom to another and one school to another. It shouldn't surprise us, then, when only about half of teachers believe they are "good at helping students develop strong social and emotional skills" and even fewer believe they have effective strategies to deploy when students don't have these skills.⁹

The fact is, when your children or grandchildren walk through the doors of school on the first day, they are entering an unacknowledged lottery. That lottery may place them in a classroom with a teacher who fosters growth mindset and encourages self-regulation skills, or in one where they will disengage after being shamed for not mastering content quickly, or left behind because the teacher believes students should sink or swim. That child's odds are further complicated by race, class, and culture; by the implicit and often unacknowledged biases all of us hold about one another; and by the impact that differences in cultural background can play in how students and teachers interpret behavior and social cues.

GOALS OF THIS BOOK: CHANGING THE ODDS

Incorporating Social, Emotional, and Cultural Competencies Throughout the Teacher Professional Development Pipeline

This book aims to change those odds. It lays out a comprehensive vision and tools for making the social, emotional, and cultural dimensions of teaching and learning a fundamental priority that can be woven into all schools and teaching preparation programs in meaningful ways, regardless of a school's resources, curricular programs, or population. It describes in detail perhaps

the most powerful—but unmined—leverage point for change that exists in the field of education: attention to and development of teacher practices at each stage of the professional development pipeline, from preservice teacher coursework and fieldwork through the first two years of teaching, and continuing throughout the professional development that teachers receive in the course of their careers.

Notably, our vision does not constitute an “add-on program.” We are not asking teachers or teacher educators to do *more*, and we are certainly not asking teachers “to be therapists,” as we often hear educators say when we talk about social and emotional competence. Rather, the approach in this book asks teachers to work *differently*, to view students from a perspective that encourages and develops their social and emotional growth in support of academic success and in concert with the efforts of families, youth leaders, clergy people, pediatricians, neighbors, and everyone who influences the life of a child. This work is not about displacing schools’ focus on math, reading, and other academic content; quite the contrary, it is about supporting it.

Build Adults’ Skills in Order to Build Students’ Skills

Many promising and successful efforts to develop students’ social and emotional learning skills have been grounded in a framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). It consists of five social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies young people need in school and in life: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.¹⁰ This framework incorporates both inter- and intrapersonal skills because healthy development includes components of both independence and interdependence: self-regulation (managing one’s own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in the service of goals), social awareness (the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others), and relationship skills (the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with others).¹¹ This five-dimension framework has been useful in driving curricular programs and goals for students, as well as some states’ and districts’ standards for what students should know and be able to do.¹²

But in our work with teachers, both those currently in schools and those in teacher preparation programs, we have seen an additional need for a clear set of competencies *adults* need, together with the teaching practices or “teacher moves” to help students develop SEL skills. For students to develop social and emotional competencies, adults must not only understand and value these competencies, but embody and model them. When it comes to social and emotional skills, “do as I say and not as I do” is a woefully ineffective approach. Students need their teachers (and other adults) to demonstrate the competencies and place a priority on them. A teacher who is easily and visibly frustrated by students’ behavior or confusion is not well positioned to build her students’ perseverance and growth mindset, for example.

Unfortunately, however, most educators receive little training in social and emotional development and how to integrate it into their practice. How to build social and emotional competencies is rarely covered in preservice teacher training programs; when it is, it is usually addressed as an isolated course with little application to practice, or as an incomplete “behavior management” approach that does not address the range of skills needed and their vital connection to culturally responsive teaching practices. A national scan of teacher preparation programs highlighted the lack of consistency in attention to the CASEL SEL competencies.¹³ Nor are these skills adequately addressed in new teacher mentoring and induction programs or in ongoing professional learning for teachers and administrators.¹⁴

The signature contribution of this book is to link the social, emotional, and culturally responsive skills young people need with the actions that teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and policy makers can take to create environments in which these skills can develop and flourish. We introduce the idea of developing teachers’ social, emotional, and cultural competencies by their use of a “lens.” Much like putting on a pair of glasses helps someone see the writing in a book or the bird flying in the distance, using the social, emotional, and cultural lens moves teachers to see things, ask questions, and gather data that would be blurry or even invisible without the lens. This lens through which educators can view their practice reflects attention to key competencies, assumptions, and habits of mind of both teachers and students.

THE CATALYST FOR THIS BOOK: DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANCHOR COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK

At the heart of the approach—and this book—is the framework developed by the Center for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child (CRTWC): the CRTWC Anchor Competencies Framework. The Anchor Competencies Framework was developed by CRTWC over a ten-year period, beginning while CRTWC was housed at the San José State University (SJSU) Department of Teacher Education, and continuing after CRTWC became part of an independent nonprofit, as we describe in chapter 1. It was driven by data-gathering that pointed out again and again that educators knew they *wanted* to integrate social and emotional learning into their practice, but they didn't know how to do it.¹⁵

To respond to that gap, we began to drill down on the fundamental practices teachers need to employ in order to build students' social and emotional skills. We also recognized and honored the need to integrate culturally responsive teaching practices, which are often treated separately, but in fact are an integral part of teaching with a social and emotional lens and an integral part of effective teaching overall. We engaged in ongoing conversations and an iterative development process with teacher educators and other university faculty, preservice teacher candidates, veteran teachers and those who supervise teacher candidates, and leaders in social and emotional learning and culturally responsive teaching practices. We reviewed research as it emerged and evolved, both focused on social, emotional, and cultural competence specifically, and on effective teaching practices generally. Through this process, we developed a set of essential teaching practices that research and experience show are connected to students' success in academics, peer relationships, and ability to thrive, as well as to effective classroom learning environments that promote such success. We call these practices *anchors* to emphasize the way that they provide solid grounding for teachers' interactions with students throughout the school day and year. These practices are not separate from pedagogy in math or science; they anchor that pedagogy in the kinds of interactions and environments students need to learn everything else.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The book has been organized as follows: In chapter 1 we introduce the rationale behind the Anchor Competencies Framework and explain how it was developed. We describe how it can be integrated into the everyday academic learning that is the traditional focus of schools, and in a way that informs and creates coherence with other programs that are often used to address aspects of social and emotional learning, student behavior, and school climate. In chapter 2, we explain the essential elements of the framework, and in chapter 3, we illustrate how all teachers can use it in practice, regardless of the subject they teach or the context in which they work. In chapter 4, we show how the framework can be adopted by teacher training programs to get teachers started on the right foot, especially in conjunction with cooperating school districts. In chapter 5, we delve deeper into how schools can incorporate the framework as part of ongoing professional development efforts. Chapter 6 explores the ways that districts, states, and universities can help to scale this work. Finally, in chapter 7, we share a vision for the future in which all educators and students have the social, emotional, and cultural supports to thrive in teaching and learning, including the conditions needed for success and areas for future efforts.

As we describe throughout the book, the social, emotional, and cultural lens can become second nature. Teachers tell us it has not only improved their relationships with students and their students' academic and life outcomes, but has made them more satisfied in their careers and more effective and confident in their practice. It is our hope that, in reading this book and using it in your work, you will feel the same inspiration and see the same kinds of changes, whether you are a current or future teacher, teacher educator, school leader, policymaker, researcher, or one of the numerous others who are critical to students' success in school and in life. Because as one teacher put it so eloquently, social, emotional, and cultural competence isn't another thing on the plate, it *is* the plate.