

# The World Changed Overnight: Now Its Education's Turn



Photo by Zack Vissels

*The Case For Social-Emotional Learning in Schools  
and How We Get it Done*

A 2016 Psychology Today article asserts, "When you teach kids emotional intelligence, how to recognize their feelings, understand where they come from, and learn how to deal with those emotions, you teach them the most essential skills for their success in life."

Plainly put, if you want children and adolescents to value their education, to value their futures, to value themselves and to value one another, a social-emotional learning curriculum is not an "and-to" or an outlier educational concept. It is essential.

To be specific, there are eleven components to a successful social-emotional learning curriculum that must be taught from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, and these elements are just as important to the success of each child and to the success of our species, as math, science, history and English language arts.

By Jean Paul Paulynice MBA,

**W**ith the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, economic uncertainty, the fight for racial equality and a significant disruption to our children's daily routines, parents and educators have their hands full. From distance learning to basic everyday activities, our kids are coming of age in a new, ever-evolving world, a world significantly different from the one we grew up in. Status quo academic education and old-guard ideals will not be sustainable. Before our collective worlds were turned upside down and inside out courtesy of the biggest pandemic to hit our planet since the 1918 Spanish Flu, our kids were already dealing with the perils of highly publicized gun violence and the mental health challenges that come with their enmeshment in social media. The world has been in rapid flux since it has been spinning, but things have reached a fever pitch, and the circumstances that surround us are merely symptoms. The systemic illness is the neglect of emotional intelligence quotient development in school-age children. After all, children become our next generation of adults.

Navigating elementary school, middle school, and high school requires a greater breadth and depth of education that academics alone cannot provide. The 2020s are the decade where the rubber meets the road; this time requires social-emotional education and the building of "EQ" or emotional intelligence quotient in school-age children. For this, we need an addendum to the Common Core curriculum that public schools across the United States have come to rely on. We need a parallel social-emotional education curriculum in all our public schools.

A recent article published in *The Guardian* titled, "Emotional Intelligence: Why it Matters and How to Teach It" echoes these sentiments, describing emotional intelligence as covering the five main areas of "self-awareness, emotional control, self-motivation, empathy and relationship skills." The article goes on to state, "It is, of course, important for good communication with others – and is therefore a gateway to better learning, friendships, academic success and employment."



Photo by Terricks Noah



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## **Understanding, Managing and Communicating**

### **Emotions**

Emotions are their own language, just like English, Spanish or French, and therefore require attention and mastery to learn and interpret in a healthy way. Another Psychology Today article, titled, "Emotions as a Second Language, Or Should They Be Our First?" explains emotional literacy as "being able to feel, identify, and adaptively use one's feeling states. This emotional fluency enhances emotional self-regulation, lessens over-reactivity to negative emotions such as anger, and is the basis of interpersonal emotional modulation."

### **Learning to Set and Achieve Individualized Goals**

Many studies have been conducted to establish the correlation between long-term goals and short-term decision making, and how a substantial long-term goal can incentivize people to make better short-term choices. Yet, common sense tells us that when young people can establish a worthy enough long-term goal that they perceive as achievable, they protect that goal by making wiser, more well thought out, short-term decisions to safeguard their future.

### **Learning to Work and Play Well with Others**

It may sound elementary, and in fact, it is. One of the greatest lessons that children should take away from their elementary school years is the ability to feel empathy for their peers, and to learn the value of teamwork, sharing with others and learning healthy forms of socialization. The elementary school years teach us how to interact and socialize in a healthy way. But we need to take this one step further. Instead of simply instilling behavior modification through devaluation - "If you

don't share your toys, the other kids won't want to play with you" – social-emotional learning curriculum would instead teach the child that the fear of lack (as in there aren't enough good toys to go around) should be replaced with love-driven behavior. In other words, the more positivity I put out into the world, the more good things will come back to me. This instills an abundance mindset rather than a lack mindset (there are more than enough good toys to go around).

### **Learning to make independent and positive choices**

How many times have we heard that old parental cliché line, "If your friends were jumping off the Empire State Building, would you do it too?!" You laugh, but peer pressure is the analogous equivalent of how a virus operates in the body of someone with a weakened immune system; it completely takes over. Peer pressure will never go away, but we can inoculate our kids by instilling the importance of listening to and trusting their own intuition, and learning to trust their own opinions and ideas when they differ from their peer groups' opinions and ideas. Children with a healthy sense of self tend to be independent thinkers who make more positive choices.

### **Identifying Their Unique "Superpower"**

Children love superheroes, from Marvel and the Avengers to their favorite sports figures, a parent, grandparent or even an older sibling. They are hungry for role models, people to emulate and to juice their sense of imagination and inspiration. A child's own sense of self begins with observation of the prototypes around them, and it is a healthy part of their development process. In emotionally healthy children, this should eventually give way to the child being able

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to identify what his or her own superpower is; something they bring to the world that is unique to them. A TIME Magazine article titled, "The Secret to Happiness is Helping Others," declares that "scientific research provides compelling data to support the anecdotal evidence that giving is a powerful pathway to personal growth and lasting happiness." Add to that, we all want to feel important and useful. It is our unique contributions to our community and to our world that provide many of the building blocks for good self-esteem and self-worth.

## **Developing Coping Strategies to Deal with Fear and Uncertainty**

Uncertainty creates fear. Fear is a natural human emotion which leads to stress. How we process, express, and channel that fearful energy can make the difference in everything from our health to our relationships to our future. Children and adolescents experience these emotions tenfold, because emotions we perceive as negative feel enormous and overwhelming to an unexperienced brain that is still developing. The development of good verbal communication skills and written communication skills are an excellent outlet for feelings of fear, as they allow children to verbally express these emotions to family members, friends, a therapist, an educator, or another positive adult role model. Well-developed written communication skills allow the child to journal their less comfortable thoughts

and emotions. Physical activity and creative pursuits are also paramount for processing and exorcising fearful thoughts and emotions. The more a child experiences positive results through these outlets, the more confidence they develop in their ability to regulate uncomfortable emotions.

## **Handling the Emotional Complexities of Adolescence**

Self-discovery, or the process of acquiring insight into one's own character, helps us identify our abilities and learn how we can leverage and develop them. It is the foundation of transformation, personal growth, and individual development. Research indicates that inner-directed discovery can be an incredibly motivating process and a very formative one in the lives of adolescents. The effect of intentional reflection, exploring one's passions, and connecting values to purpose allows us to discover who we truly are. A recent article on popular Australian parenting portal, [raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au), titled, "Social and Emotional Changes: 9 – 15 Years" makes the point that during these tween and teenage years "your child's brain is still learning how to control and express emotions in a grown-up way." Up until now, save for the occasional conversation with a parent, middle or high school guidance counselor or perhaps a therapist, your adolescent child has been going it alone, without the benefit of a structured education in how to healthfully manage the emotional part of their brain.



## **Entering an Adult World with Innovative Techniques for Success**

If there is anything this global pandemic has taught us as a nation, it is the importance of adaptability and innovation. Our daily lives abruptly shifted, and we all acclimated to learning new ways of doing old things. For today's youth, gaining innovative skills are the cutting edge to re-imagining adult success. Now more than ever before, young people benefit from having the agency to freely and courageously express their creativity, while mapping out unconventional pathways to success. This new era presents a wonderful opportunity for young adults in their teen years to be supported in their pursuit of establishing their own playbook for success. Go to college, graduate from college, get a job and keep that job for forty years was largely a twentieth century construct. So why haven't parents and educators evolved beyond that rulebook? Why is the tail wagging the dog as we see more and more young people starting businesses out of their dorm rooms? Young people are starting to innovate and design their lives in a non-linear fashion that suits the twenty-first century, but they need structured support along the way.

which asked 14 - 24 year olds in the UK how social media platforms impacted their health and wellbeing. The survey results found that Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram all led to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, poor body image and loneliness. What we are witnessing is a generation of young people who are facing more opportunities to experience mental health challenges, while being unarmed with the self-esteem-building education to put it all in proper perspective. When children learn meaningful social-emotional skills, they enrich their own lives and enhance their future potential.

## **Developing a Strong Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) and Empathy**

Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to identify and manage their own emotions, while social intelligence refers to the ability to understand and appropriately respond to another person's feelings. While many children experience pressure to excel academically from an early age, few mature realizing that social and emotional intelligence is equally important, if not more important, than academic excellence. Developing empathy for others and increasing social- emotional capital

## **Learning to Make Complex Choices Based on Core Values**

Life can be hard, and 2020 has been no exception to that rule. Young people are bombarded by societal pressures, social media, and peer influence. Gaining the autonomy needed to make healthy decisions is critical to overall wellbeing and success. Research shows that children who truly understand themselves and can identify their core values are more likely to successfully navigate complicated life decisions than their peers who are unable to identify their personal core values. Learning the critical skills needed to make complex choices is a fundamental aspect of healthy development and a key indicator of potential success. Young people who understand themselves and their values are much better positioned to take on the challenges that life presents.

is essential for the wellbeing and success of young people. Research shows that children who develop a strong social-emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) are more likely to exhibit strong coping mechanisms when faced with challenges. They are also more likely to make healthy, value-based choices. Children are more likely to excel academically and gain future success in their chosen field, as well as in their adult relationships, when they have a strong emotional intelligence quotient as their foundation. As a bonus, children with high emotional intelligence quotient are more likely to become adults who raise their children with high emotional intelligence quotient.



## **IRL (In Real Life) Social Skills and Healthy Social Adaptivity**

In the era of Instagram and TikTok, it is easy for young people to lose sight of the importance of building healthy interpersonal skills, specifically the skills that occur face-to-face and voice-to-voice, and not behind a screen. It is all too easy for young people to forget that they are surrounded by IRL (in real life) communities who care for their well-being, when they are so outwardly focused on social media approval from anonymous strangers. Learning how to re-focus on the people in your life and how to positively interact with all kinds of people, especially those from different backgrounds or lived experiences, is essential to adult success. ChildMind.org reported on a survey conducted by the Royal Society for Public Health,



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