

“Connected & Respected”

When people talk about Social Emotional Learning (SEL), they typically turn towards the Psychologist or Social Worker for guidance. When there is a problem, teachers have asked that I come in to present a classroom lesson or pull students out for some type of counseling support. Although these interventions are not without merit, and there will always be a need for these intensive interventions from support staff, this does not address every child’s need. These interventions are more reactive than proactive. Additionally, when children are pulled out of their classroom for small group intervention, it is difficult for them to take a newly learned skill and generalize it into their everyday environment. Last year, Mrs. Iraggi and I helped facilitate bringing the “Connected & Respected” program to Seaman Elementary School. This is an SEL program for every child, in every classroom, and in every grade. The following information will provide you with some background information on SEL and the “Connected and Respected” Program.

A school wide SEL program is not only state mandated, but also best practice. It has been proven that children who receive SEL instruction are more connected to teachers and schools, more engaged in learning, more motivated to learn, better behaved, and less likely to engage in problem behavior. Research has shown that children who receive SEL instruction are also less anxious and less depressed, receive better grades, and perform better on tests of achievement.

So, what does a well developed SEL program look like? It is NOT just about learning vocabulary words, although a good program should include appropriate emotional vocabulary words. It’s NOT just character education, although this should be an important component of an SEL program. It should NOT be isolated lessons about getting along with each other. A good SEL program should help children learn and apply social emotional skills on a regular basis. It should encompass both prevention and intervention. A good program should not teach the skill once, but review the skill continuously throughout each lesson and within each new grade as students mature. A good program should provide for teaching explicit skills and modeling of the skills, as well as provide opportunities to practice, reflect, and reinforce the skills. There should be regular lessons within the classroom to increase generalizability.

The “Connected and Respected” program was chosen because it does all of the above mentioned things. “Connected and Respected” is a researched based set of lessons from the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program first developed in 1984. The Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration designated the program as “an exemplary research based program”. It is nationally recognized as the most

successful and longest running program in Social Emotional Learning. “Connected & Respected” has been cited as one of the most promising violence prevention programs amongst public health experts. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning (CASEL) chose this program as one of the select programs that meet the highest standards of effectiveness in SEL programs.

“Connected and Respected” encompasses character education, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relations. It is not a bully prevention program per se, but it does address how to deal with bullying behavior, prejudice, assertiveness, and concepts of peace. It addresses anger management, listening skills, and working cooperatively. It helps children in developing what I call the 3 C’s - Character, Confidence, and Competence.

There are 16 lessons within the program that are a guide for each grade. The lessons may include the following main components:

1. **Gathering** – This is a positive, community building experience. It includes an experiential activity or sharing that relates to the main purpose of the lesson.
2. **Structured Activity** – This is where the children get explicit practice of the skill being addressed.
3. **Literature** – This is often used to reinforce a particular concept and provide further discussion regarding the targeted skill.
4. **Reflection Time** – Students come together to reflect and provide evidence that they have internalized the skill.

As you can see, this program provides thorough teaching material for SEL instruction. A main goal is to help children manage their own emotions and become more effective communicators. As an added bonus, the link to increasing academic achievement is clear. Students perform better when they feel connected to their classroom and respected for who they are... and therein lies the perfect title for the program...”Connected and Respected”.

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