INSPIRING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL GROWTH IN COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TEAMS

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Are you teaching in a trauma-informed school? If so, you've probably wondered, like I have, if there is a way that social-emotional learning (SEL) can happen in a math class. Mathematics curriculum is typically very dense, and I have been determined that any changes I make not detract from content mastery in the long-run. I am now really excited, though, to find myself efficiently integrating SEL on a daily basis. As I reflect on how team roles have supported my students' SEL, I can see parallels with **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**, as well as the development of many of the **soft skills** employers are seeking from new hires.

Every conscientious teacher is concerned when individual students' needs may not be met. For example, if teams are not high-functioning, it can sometimes be more challenging for the teacher to discover who is *hiding* from (or faking understanding of) content mastery. Hiding may be associated with the need for shelter, safety, and security along with a lack of confidence that success and growth are within reasonable reach for all. Sometimes, well-meaning teammates "cover" for hiders instead of building a bridge for understanding. SEL involves helping students understand what it means to *help*. SEL must be modeled and taught, and inquiry teams are the perfect context.

In the beginning of the year, I study my students' interactions before solidifying teams for the first unit. I watch for natural empathizers, academic leaders, detail managers, and who is distracting or just following along. The initial roles assigned can capitalize on natural strengths. Those students can serve as role models and/or provide ideas for how role executions can be improved.

Throughout the year, I try to have my students learn how to function in all four of the CPM roles. Teens will be teens, though, and having to override social instincts can sometimes be a challenge. As in any workplace, productivity is the overarching goal. The threat of restructuring or reassignment

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is often enough to motivate workers to stay on track. So it is in my classroom. That is one reason why I treat my teams like mini-departments, and I am the Chief Academic Officer.

There are some basic dynamics to consider when grouping students. As the CPM teacher notes mention, I try not to put very quick thinking, decisive students with those who take the longest to process new information, or they all get frustrated with each other*. When I have a pair of students who work particularly well together, I put them diagonally from each other so the flow of information between them is readily accessible to the others. (Thank you, John Hayes, for that tip!) I also develop a climate that says, "This is similar to what happens in real workplaces. Start practicing!" On one hand, the assigned roles can help build a "family-caring" SEL environment. On the other hand, the roles can serve as on-the-job training.

Facilitators
These students function as department managers. Language learners and other students who struggle to communicate are often my first choice because they control the flow of information and are responsible for ensuring everyone understands. But it is crucial that they receive adequate support from an empathetic teammate. When a team is not productive, I usually speak with the Facilitator first. However, if some of the teammates are routinely off task, we all have a conversation about fairness, goal setting, and if necessary, "restructuring."

Task Managers
Humans are prone to wander. Task Managers are primarily responsible for catching this behavior and redirecting. They can be a huge support for Facilitators. That role might be most closely related to Human Resource Management.

Resource Managers
This role relates to *logistics managers* in the workplace. They collect the homework each day, and they make sure the names are written on them. As I pass by to collect the work, Resource Managers explain reasons behind any missing work. Productivity is a team issue.

Recorder/Reporters

Recorder/Reporters are *documentation specialists*, which are in high demand in our contemporary workforce. They assure documentation is clear and adequate. Everyone should be involved in writing, and no one should be day-dreaming or copying. They may orchestrate a switch-and-critique whereby teammates offer each other ways to improve their notes.

Role playing

On the days that roles are changed, I have my students act out appropriate responses. For example, I may have each Facilitator demonstrate how they would start their group's activity. Task Managers explain how they redirect wayward teammates. (This is typically hilarious, but it builds courage to do that.) Resource Managers show how to inspire the rest of the team to pick up. They explain how they motivate students who are slow to locate their homework or who have forgotten to do their homework. Recorder/Reporters might explain what they look for in good notes and how to tactfully encourage some improvements.

Beyond content-related exchanges, roles can easily be expanded for social-emotional development in tandem with other soft skills. When students are trauma informed, working in collaborative teams provide natural opportunities to practice empathy and support, as all work toward productivity within a warm classroom. Students learn to distinguish between healthy socializing, brain breaks, and distraction.

I have had versions of most of these conversations with my students:

> Can you help me understand why your team only got through the first four questions today? I noticed your Facilitator and Task Manager were having difficulty keeping the conversation on task today. Were you doing anything to help with that?

Is it fair not to do your homework, to forget key concepts, and then to expect your teammates to re-explain to you on a regular basis?** Do all your teammates feel as though you are including them in the discussions, and is there more you could do to encourage that (Maslow's social needs)? What do you need from your team to get you to contribute to productivity? What do you need from your group to give you the courage to reach for understanding instead of hiding (college readiness or life-long learning skills)?

Teams also inspire me to strategically encourage and empower. I routinely send home emails that mention particular things a student does that contribute to the functionality of a team. I may say, "You have a particularly challenging team this time, but I want you to know I think you are having an amazing impact. If you need a recommendation for a leadership position somewhere, please let me write one for you." Or, "I heard you say _____. That had to be tremendously encouraging to your teammate." These meet Maslow's need for nurturing ego. Since each of the team roles relates to contemporary positions in the job market, I encourage students to refer to each team role as parallel experiences when they apply for jobs. This meets Maslow's need for self-actualization.

Managing the teams means that I do not get to sit down at my desk very often. Given human nature, my proximity in the room has the strongest effect on team focus. This past year was only my second with CPM. But by the end of this year, my students were willing to tackle activities with a higher cognitive demand (Depth of Knowledge 3–4). The most rewarding part was hearing from parents who did not think their students could learn in a team environment but found themselves convinced of its value by the end of the year.

When students are socially and emotionally healthy, I would argue they are very unlikely to commit acts of violence. So, I see my successes in SEL as also helping to secure students' physical safety. The more I improve in coaching my teams into productivity, the less I see of the predicted hurdles I heard about from naysayers before my district adopted the program. Because I see the assigned roles as opportunities to teach the whole child without sacrificing content, I cannot imagine ever turning back.

*Sometimes a slow processor wants to be on a faster-moving team, and I discovered this is possible if that student previews material the night before.

**When homework is not done due to personal hardship, that is an opportunity to demonstrate mercy. This past year, when four different students were not doing homework simply out of choice, I put them all together on a team. Most of them realized they were on a "slow boat to nowhere" and requested another chance to be on a well-functioning team, agreeing to do their homework. I encourage slower processors to include a quick preview of the next day's lesson in their homework routine so they can have an early start processing the words. That practice can be transformative for them.