Greater Good Science Center
“The Science of a Meaningful Life”

August 3, 2013
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The Science of a Meaningful Life

The Greater Good Science Center studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society.
Describe one great thing that happened to you this week.

What happened? Who was there? How did it make you feel?
What is social-emotional learning?
New View of Human Development

50% social-emotional

50% cognitive
Students today… (Damon, 2009; Levine, 2008)

- Lack of purpose
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Self-injure
- Eating disorders
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.CASEL.org)

Social & Emotional Learning Core Competencies

- **Self-Management**: Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals
- **Self-Awareness**: Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and challenges
- **Social Awareness**: Showing understanding and empathy for others
- **Responsible Decision-Making**: Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior
- **Relationship Skills**: Forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict
Benefits of social-emotional learning (CASEL)

Promotes:
• Academic success
• Health & well-being
• Communication skills & teamwork
• Positive attitudes about self, school, peers, teachers

Prevents:
• Alcohol & drug abuse
• Violence
• Truancy
• Bullying
Happiness

“the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.”

(Lyubomirsky, The How of Happiness, 2007)
Happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2007)

- Genes
- Daily Activities
- Life Circumstances

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Happiness
(Peterson, 2006)

1. Hedonic treadmill

2. Flow

3. Meaningful life
What IS “a meaningful life”? 
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Empathy

“the ability to sense other people’s emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling.”
Empathy

(Lamm, Decety, & Singer, 2011)
Why is empathy important?

• Building block of morality
• Relationships
• More likely to help
• Reduces prejudice & racism
• Good for marriage
• Lessens bullying
How to develop empathy in children...

- Actively imagine how another is feeling
- *Play games*
- Be open about emotions
- *Meditation*
- Don’t jump to conclusions
- *Teach emotional literacy*
- Flirtatiousness
- Interest
- Happiness
- Politeness
Happiness

Eyelids: Muscles tighten around eyes, pouching of lower eyelid

Lips: Corners pulled up

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- Pride
- Contempt
- Excitement
- Anger
Pride

Head: Tilts backward
Lips: Corners go up in slight smile
Jaw: Thrusts out
- Satisfaction
- Flirtatiousness
- Love
- Compassion
Love

Head: Tilts to the side

Eyes: Lower eyelid tightened

Lips: Corners pulled up
Compassion

“the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.”
Benefits of Compassion

- Health
- Happiness
- Better relationships
- *More compassionate society*
Empathy & Compassion Inhibitors

1. Lack of resources
2. Don’t feel safe
3. Lack of time
4. Not deserving of help
5. Lack of identification with other person
6. Power imbalance
7. Emotion overload – the myth of “compassion fatigue”
How to develop compassion

• Look for commonalities
• Calm the inner warrior
• Encourage cooperation, not competition
• See people as individuals (not abstractions)
• Don’t play the blame game
• Know you’re capable of making a difference
• Model compassion for your kids
• Don’t be a sponge
Altruism

“when we act to promote someone else’s welfare, even at a risk or cost to ourselves.”
Benefits of Altruism

- Happiness
- Health
- Relationships
- Education
- Altruism contagion

(Dunn, 2010)
How to develop altruism...

- Get connected
- *See yourself in others*
- Encourage collaboration & emphasize shared goals
- *Acknowledge giving—but not with rewards*
- Get time on your side
- *Build a supportive community*
- Fight inequality
- *Lead by example*
How to develop altruism...

Football
Forgiveness

“a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness.”
Benefits of Forgiveness

- Happiness
- Health
- Improved relationships
- Boosts kindness & connectedness
Teaching Children to Forgive

- Identify emotions
- Practice mindfulness
- Rumination only hurts us more
- Let go of things not in our control
- Best revenge is a life well-lived
Play

In its purest form: unstructured, self-motivated, imaginative, independent
Play

• Critical for physical, intellectual, and social-emotional health
• For infants and toddlers:
  • Colors, shapes, tastes, sounds
• For elementary children:
  • Mutual respect, friendship, cooperation, & competition
• For adolescents & adults:
  • Stress-reduction, physical fitness, & flow
Let’s Play a Game!

• Giants, Wizards, & Elves
  • Giants conquer wizards
  • Wizards conquer elves
  • Elves conquer Giants
Not just for children....

I think I got it.

5 minutes after Mindy died trying, Brice finally understood fractions.
Teachers with Social and Emotional Skills

- Warm & supportive teacher-student relationships
- Positive classroom climate
- Better classroom management
- Effective implementation of SEL programs
We must be the change we wish to see in the world.
- M.K. Gandhi
I’ve gotten much better at teaching as I’m able to discern more of my own nature, more of who I really am. And when I say, ‘who I am,’ I don’t mean what band I like, what flavors of ice cream I prefer. Instead, I mean at the very core fundamental level of it: Who am I? And what am I? What am I about? What am I here for? And that kind of examination is an ongoing practice every day.

That daily self-reflection or introspection has been fundamental for me in becoming a better teacher—to know myself enough to be able to try and remove the prejudices, biases, inhibitions, & limited perspectives—sometimes at a very subtle level—that I bring that gets in the way of their learning. It takes a lot of introspective work to root these things out in order to be clearer with the students. -- John Hunter, author of World Peace & Other 4th Grade Achievements
“What’s wrong with you?”

becomes

“What happened to you?”
**Deeper personhood** -- our underlying human potential/capacity for life-giving qualities, such as love, wisdom, compassion, creativity, joy, and courage.

We are introduced to our deeper personhood by others who see it in us, take joy in the basic goodness of our being, wish us well, thus helping us to notice the potential they see and love in us, to acknowledge it, accept it, inhabit it.

This empowers our ability similarly to appreciate the deeper personhood in others, to relate to them in their underlying potential, thereby helping them to notice what we see and love in them.

-- John Makransky, Boston College
We’re looking for that silver bullet...but I think the better way up is in.

– John Hunter
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