Dr. Sharon:

If we can instill in our students that understanding that this is a journey of education. At this moment, yes, you can't do that hypotenuse, but not yet, you're going to be able to do it. Stick with me. I think it's a shift in the way we interact with our students to ensure that we're not putting them into set patterns, we get rid of our own biases, and we understand that every student has that potential for growth.

Speaker 2:

This is the ORISE Featurecast. Join host, Michael Holtz, for conversations with ORISE experts on STEM workforce development, scientific and technical reviews, and the evaluation of radiation exposure and environmental contamination. You'll also hear from ORISE research program participants and their mentors as they talk about their experiences and how they are helping shape the future of science. Welcome to the ORISE Featurecast.

Michael Holtz:

Welcome to the ORISE Featurecast. As ever, it's me, your host, Michael Holtz from the communications and Marketing Department at the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education. It is time once again for a conversation about one of my very favorite programs, and I say that with great joy, the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship. My friend, and I'm not going to lie, playmate when it comes to this podcast because we always have such a good time. My friend, Zachary Minchow-Proffitt. Zach, you're a current fellow and my co-host for this year's iteration of the fellowship podcast. Welcome back.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Thank you, Michael. Thank you. I am glad to be in the proverbial sandbox, as it were. I wasn't really a slide kid when I was young. I was more of a sandbox kid.

Michael Holtz:

Well, I don't know about you, but back when I was a kid, those slides could burn your [inaudible 00:02:06]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh my gosh. Yes.

Michael Holtz:

... literally.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely.

Michael Holtz:

We didn't care about soft landings and all of-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

No.

Michael Holtz:

... that stuff back in Generation X. Play hard, live hard. But here we are, we're talking about social-emotional learning. Zach, we have some great guests with us today. Tell us who is joining us for this incredible conversation?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Absolutely. First up, we have our current fellow who I'm so grateful to have. Ralph, why don't you tell a little bit about yourself and where you taught before this and where you're in the fellowship?

Ralph:

Well, I've been a math teacher in New Jersey for 32 years, and by teacher that means teacher of teachers, teacher of students, supervisor of instruction, all sorts of different roles, researcher, and general I like to play with math wherever I can go.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure. Sure.

Ralph:

I've worked with the Museum of Math in New York City, and done work across the country with software development so that students themselves can play with math and-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I love that.

Ralph:

... discover their talents. I love books as well, so this year I'm at the Library of Congress.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

As a very apt place.

Michael Holtz:

Excellent.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Very good. That's the right spot without a doubt for you. It's been so cool watching your journey there. Thank you for joining us. We are also so fortunate to have an alumnus with us, Dr. Sharon. She's coming to us from the West Coast today. Sharon, welcome to the podcast. Thank you for joining us. Do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself and what you're up to?

Dr. Sharon:

Sure. Thank you so much for having me. My play box or sandbox has always been science education. Love science education.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Love it.

Dr. Sharon:

I actually had got received a doctorate in chemistry, and at that point in time decided that it was really... I had a strong passion for [inaudible 00:04:19] education, and so I ventured into that arena, really worked on standards from the national to the state level. I've written a lot of curriculum with respect to chemistry curriculum. Most recently I am working for a school called Sacred Heart. I am pursuing an admin role so that I'm actually looking at those overtones or actually what holds us together as a curriculum with respect to the whole child and how do we actually work towards making sure that we have a whole child approach addressing social emotional learning in every classroom.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I love that. That's the in between that we need to make sure that our schools are nurturing environments, so much about the social emotional health of our students comes from that. Thank you for that.

Dr. Sharon:

[inaudible 00:05:17] should add as an Einstein fellow, I was actually a congressional fellow, so I-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes. Cool.

Dr. Sharon:

... [inaudible 00:05:23] education policy. It's been a great time. Great time.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Wow. [inaudible 00:05:29] it was committee you said? Sorry.

Dr. Sharon:

No. I worked for one of the senators offices.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Got you. That's awesome. That's wonderful work.

Michael Holtz:

Very, very cool. I guess just to lay the foundation, and Zach, maybe I'll start with you. When we talk about social emotional learning, what are we talking about?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I guess I wanted to give us a common definition of social emotional learning. Just a real quick history of social emotional learning is it started in the '60s, late '60s, there was this idea in New Haven, Connecticut, it was a radical idea that we should be caring about social and emotional needs of students, which sounds so crazy today. But over the course of the next 60 years hence we've gone through a whole bunch of different iterations of it. There's a overarching organization that has been developed called CASEL, C-A-S-E-L, which we'll often use as a foundation for our definitions of what it means to implement social emotional learning in the classroom. One of the biggest pieces of social emotional learning that we're going to try to reflect on is this idea that like SEL is been shown to have positive impact through a variety of meta-analyses on improving student outcomes.

Just wholeheartedly supporting students. There's this a shift and there has been a shift that's been occurring over the last half century towards incorporating more of these social emotional learning standards in the class. I think we all know that throughout COVID, social emotional health, mental health was a big part of what many students were grappling with. I think there's been a reinvigoration of focus on it, but I'm so, so fortunate to have these two experts here to help us piece it all together because I have it more from the practitioner level. I've been in the classroom more recently, most recently, and never done anything else in the educational sphere. I wanted to bring these other perspectives on it into the conversation.

Michael Holtz:

Awesome. Awesome. Awesome. Now that we have a base-level understanding of what we're talking about, for Ralph, I'll start with you. How has the rise of social emotional learning changed the way you approach teaching STEM content in your classroom?

Ralph:

Well, I'll admit that I hadn't really used the term. But as a math teacher, I was glad to see the term rise in importance amongst all subjects because as a math teacher, students' feelings were always at the forefront of the class [inaudible 00:08:36] unfortunately.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Michael Holtz:

I relate to that.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

Some people say math doesn't care about your feelings or physics doesn't care about your feelings because the laws of gravity are going to happen regardless of whether you find them [inaudible 00:08:56]-

Michael Holtz:

Whether you hate them or not, there they are.

Ralph:

But as a mathematics teacher and as a researcher while I was working on my doctorate, our thoughts were always around how students are both cognitively thinking about the subject and also managing their feelings about it with the struggles that they'll inevitably have as they learn it and their social awareness about how they look at other people. Like, "Is this person smarter than me in math? Maybe I should not speak because I'm of one gender versus another." All those dynamics were something that as a math teacher, I always tried to be acutely aware of.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I think that's... I know personally, I've been stressed in some math classes before. It always made a big difference in my willingness to engage based on whether or not I felt that they valued the social emotional component of our learning together. That's good to hear that. I do think that nowadays it's almost immersed in the way that we're taught, the way that we're trained. Even if you don't use the word in preparing your lessons, it's still embedded in a lot of the ways we do it, the way we educate our young people. How about you, Sharon? What's your take on this?

Dr. Sharon:

Well, what I was thinking about is when a student walks into our room, or even when you're working with a fellow educator on a team, a colleague, you never really know what they're carrying. What is in their backpack?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

They might've had a really rushed morning. The student might've missed breakfast. They might be having an argument at home or a sibling stole something from them and they're upset about it. We just don't know what the student is bringing and is carrying in their backpack, and then we have this emphasis in this job of I'm really going to teach [inaudible 00:11:06] mx + b. That is what my objective is for the day.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Right.

Dr. Sharon:

I'm trying to get that [inaudible 00:11:11] so I think what social emotional learning has done is heighten this awareness that in our own way we need to do things that good teachers do, which is greet a student and say, "Hello, how are you doing?" Doing a quick check-in, even if it's what's your favorite color? To just... Or what was your favorite food? It's getting to know our students in a way that makes us human as well as them human so that then we can take those three to five, three minutes of class-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

... to open the door so that we can actually discuss mitochondria and cells. It's like we actually have to take that time in order to prepare them for learning. I think social emotional learning has opened that door to give us permission to see our students not just as students, but the humans that they are, and to allow us to see our colleagues likewise.

Michael Holtz:

Sharon, it sounds like it takes a little bit of the pressure off almost of-

Dr. Sharon:

Yeah.

Michael Holtz:

... you have to live up to the standard and you better understand what mitochondria are before you leave the room today.

Dr. Sharon:

Right.

Michael Holtz:

Just as he said, understanding the whole student and where did they come from, and how did their day start, and where are they mentally and emotionally for the 35 minutes that you have to instruct them on the subject at hand.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. I think that that's... We think about it as building relationships a lot of times, but isn't it so interesting how in order for permission to be granted to teachers to prioritize relationship building, we had to almost deconstruct the social science behind, well, is it academically useful to be friends or to make our students feel good instead of-

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

... the humanistic approach of, well, of course they're humans, and so we should seek to make them feel welcome. It was something like 11% or something on some growth margin. I think it was in the 2010s when they started doing these meta-analyses of SEL implementation and whether or not it actually had academic benefit. I think it's just such an interesting paradigm to think that it has to be worth it on the end of course exam or the AP exam in order for us to feel like we have the ability to relinquish some of that precious class time. When in reality because we're humans and because we see them as other people in our classroom, we really should just be welcoming them and seeking to forge that relationship no matter what.

Dr. Sharon:

If we really think about it... I'm sorry. If we really think about it, students need to feel safe.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah.

Dr. Sharon:

They need to be with a trusted adult. One way you establish that is by that quick check-in, that smile, that greeting at the door. Those are ways to prep for learning.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure. Absolutely. Ralph?

Ralph:

Yeah. I was having a flashback as you were speaking, Zack, about a... I can't remember now. Maybe it was on the wall of my kindergarten classroom or the wall-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh, man. That's awesome.

Ralph:

It just showed kids doing everyday activities, and those activities weren't passing a test.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Right.

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

It's like most of their lives. Right? Yeah.

Ralph:

It was things that... Getting along with other people. I'm going to have to find this in the archives somewhere. But getting along with people, communicating, playing, organizing, all the things that sometimes people I think incorrectly call quote, unquote, "soft skills."

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Right.

Ralph:

These are the things... These are the outcomes of school as well. I guess I'm in the mode of I'm not going to ask for permission first to do this. I'll ask-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

... for forgiveness later because attending the social emotional learning is something that benefits students long after the last standardized test that they're going to take.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Absolutely. It carries. Yeah. It really does carry forward in their lives. I think one of the hardest parts about maybe since 2014-ish in dealing with social emotional learning is there's a lot of focus on the individual, the individual student reflecting on their stability, their resilience, their perseverance. But the interpersonal piece of it, and how we've had to reckon with the way that technology has almost sought to replace some of the actual personal, the interpersonal aspect of social emotional learning, which is community building for the students, has made it a little bit more difficult because there's competing voices in that space. What strategies have you guys found in the classroom? Are you tech heavy? Do you believe in the technology to connect? Have you implemented technology in your classrooms, used social media in lessons, or are you more on the cagey side when it comes to that? Do you prefer the person face-to-face approach when you're thinking about these challenging subjects like math? In the classroom at least. Or chemistry, oh my gosh, that's another one I hear a lot of emotion about in my school.

Dr. Sharon:

[inaudible 00:16:50] chemistry between us.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Dr. Sharon:

I'll tackle this one first.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Go ahead, Sharon.

Dr. Sharon:

I think there is a lot to be said about the chemistry between us and the inability or the lack of practice of having-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

... those face-to-face conversations. We've actually, as a school, moved towards... We yonder in middle school. There's a progression. There's no cell phones allowed in the elementary school. In the middle school, the phones are yonder, so the students don't have them at all. Then there's an agreement with the high school students that they're kept in the backpack, and that way they're out of sight. Now, that gives a teacher the option if there's going to be a need to photograph that beautiful titration color change, they can do so.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

However, it is out of sight. Then there's no phones during lunch anymore.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh, wow.

Dr. Sharon:

This has been a huge shift in our culture.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes.

Dr. Sharon:

It's to promote that type of personal interaction. Now, you can't just do that. You actually have to have parent support, teacher support.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Michael Holtz:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

We've had to call out some teachers to say, "You can't have your phone if the kids don't have their phones." Also, we've provided options during the day, so there's games, there's discussions. Lunch has become more... You can't just assume it's going to happen-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

... so we've actually put things in place so that there's activities for kids to begin to have that dialogue because we've really seen since COVID kids don't know how to start a conversation, which is where I think social emotional learning and practices can really help. That check in. That there needs to actually be some guidance with students because it has really impacted the way that they... Often positively, but often negatively how to interact with each other in person.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure. Yeah. It's hard. Just real quick, I want to let Ralph go. But you said, "yonder," is that like a-

Dr. Sharon:

Oh, yonder.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

... a device or something?

Dr. Sharon:

It's a pouch.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

How does it work? Okay.

Dr. Sharon:

It's a pouch. I recently went to Othello in New York and saw Denzel Washington, which was amazing, but they yondered all of the cell phones of all of the people who attended on Broadway.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh my gosh.

Dr. Sharon:

It's a pouch that you lock, and you lock your phone in. They secured that every phone was turned off and they locked it away so no one could text or take photos or answer calls or anything. The theater was silent.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Wow.

Michael Holtz:

Oh my gosh.

Dr. Sharon:

It's crazy.

Michael Holtz:

It sounds like heaven.

Dr. Sharon:

[inaudible 00:19:41] magnetic release in order to let the phones go.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

The teacher has a magnetic release [inaudible 00:19:48]-

Dr. Sharon:

The teacher has a magnet to lock the phone away and to unlock it at the end of the day.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I know that's-

Dr. Sharon:

[inaudible 00:19:54] is doing the same thing.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Virginia has recently taken up something very similar policy-wise, not necessarily implementation-wise. It's a cool thing, but I know that there are two schools of thought. Lots of classrooms seek the immersion and the seamless integration of these technologies to try to take a practiced approach. I know that it's still an ongoing conversation. Ralph, what about you? How do you feel about all this?

Ralph:

Well, you'll probably have to edit this down after [inaudible 00:20:26]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Hold forth for us.

Ralph:

I started my career, and I have clear memories of students passing notes to each other on paper, staring into space to daydream. Then it went from there to pagers. After pagers, it was flip phones and the initial texting under the chair to the current technology. When we think of social-emotional learning, math is learned both through concentration and through conversation, and trying to create the conditions for that technology can be a great help, it can also be a hindrance. When laptops first started being a thing in the classroom, kids would open them up and, okay, do we need to lock them down so they're actually engaging with what we're doing in class as opposed to searching for something else?

Then phones provide an even faster way of diverting your attention to something else, but I think it all comes down to the same principles of what's the technology there for? If it can promote concentration because you found something that is so engrossing on that piece of technology that gets them then conversing about the elements of the lesson, then that's the win. Yeah. Teachers always need to pay attention to the communities of which their students come from. Technology can be a way of connecting you to that community. It can also be a way of getting off track.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

To keep people on track, I think it's like any tool that we've invented for education over thousands of years, with AI and everything like that now as well. It's around picking the things that are going to connect with your students.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure. Yeah. I have even recently encountered this through the teacher lens. As we recruit new teachers in my school district, there's a mentorship process for the first year where... Not just school-based, but also content-specific mentorship at the division level. I had a bunch of these new teachers in my classroom once a month. At the beginning they were like, "Wait, we have to drive to this other building from our school at the end of the day. Isn't that a lot?" I'm like, "Well, yeah, it is a lot, but here are the benefits you're getting." They were very hedged at the beginning, and they were not really sure this was going to be worth it.

Then at the end of the school year, I got several notes from people saying, "I'm so glad that we had this cohort in person." It was very apparent to this group of young teachers, most of them, 23, 24, 25, how much better the experience was when you're face to face as opposed to being distributed. Even in their own schools on a daily basis, they email, they have Zooms or whatever in their school with people in the building. There was a nice turn of perspective on the value of being in the same room with people. I think that's a big part of the social emotional learning piece is we're asking students to be in the room with other people, and increasingly our lives are lived in separate rooms or are lived in separate digital arenas.

Michael Holtz:

Right. Even at home, you've got-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Texting my son from the basement.

Michael Holtz:

... [inaudible 00:24:43]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Holtz:

Mom and dad are downstairs on their phones, or you're out to dinner and four people are sitting around the table, but they're looking at their phones and not each other. I do love the idea of... I almost want to have yonder at home.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Self-yonder.

Michael Holtz:

Everybody's going to self-yonder.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Yeah. One of the strategies that I use to talk about distraction is we actually do statistics at the beginning of the year with the number of notifications that students get in a single class period.

Michael Holtz:

Oh, wow.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

We talk about attention and throughout the whole... Because we have these big long lab periods that are three hours and 20 minutes long, so 200 minutes. You can imagine the number of notifications that a class of say 25 kids might get over that duration. Then we use that as an informative number for if it takes this amount of time to redirect your attention post-notification, what is the chance that our class could have some undistracted learning environment for any length of time. I try to get them to ask different questions about attention or about focus. We do some learning at the beginning hoping that they might see some of those. Then throughout the year, we might visit it in a couple of different ways. But it is through... You have to constantly be reminding students, I think, of how to be resilient when there's an easy option to not do so in difficult subjects like physics or like math. That's a big part. Kids who take part and who are earnest really find it to be valuable, I think.

Michael Holtz:

[inaudible 00:26:41]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Any cool lessons that you do? I did a lesson with Ralph about statistics at NCTM, that was really good. The walking one with the distribution on the plot. That's not really SEL related. I just thought that was a cool lesson. Do you-

Dr. Sharon:

I wanted [inaudible 00:26:58]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Go ahead.

Dr. Sharon:

... think along those lines, I'm not sure if you're getting at strategies that can be done-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

... especially as a science teacher.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah.

Dr. Sharon:

So many of the curriculums we use across the board or anytime we do labs, we are often in groups of four. It's common in a science lab to say, "I have a reporter, I have a recorder-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes. The timekeeper.

Dr. Sharon:

... I have the person that gets the materials. I have the-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

Right? You have roles that you play. One of the things that I've done in the past, and I've encouraged the teachers I work with to do is not only to set those roles, but to change those roles rather frequently even.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure. Yeah.

Dr. Sharon:

Because what it does is it builds empathy. I think one of the social emotional learnings that's key for its success is that not only are we in the same room with each other and we're learning how to speak with each other, but we're going to be empathetic to the different roles that we take on in the classroom. I think a really simple way a teacher can actually get social emotional learning in the STEM field is actually to have people switch roles within any group work and to not make it always the same. There's different techniques, as you guys know, like popsicle sticks or something to draw it out.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Playing cards. Yeah. [inaudible 00:28:25]-

Dr. Sharon:

Yah. Whatever it is.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

That's awesome.

Dr. Sharon:

But changing the role, not allowing that student to only ever be the person who is reporting out.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Dr. Sharon:

Shifting it. It really does build empathy, and that's what we want. We want to understand that we need to have a lot of different roles to keep the world going. At the same time, we need to be empathetic to the strengths and the courage it takes to take on something that's a little bit not in the wheelhouse of the person.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Absolutely.

Dr. Sharon:

I love that strategy.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Hit the nail on the head. That's great. Yeah.

Michael Holtz:

Yeah. I think that's [inaudible 00:28:58]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

We want them to be wearing different hats.

Ralph:

Yeah. Sharon, I very much agree with everything you just said about understanding that different roles are essential to... I'm thinking about how science is done in the world, and I was just at something sponsored by AEF. The scientists were talking almost exactly what you were saying there, that none of them could do that alone. They all had to bounce ideas off each other and getting different people in the room who had different talents and had different backgrounds helped them figure out things that they couldn't do themselves. Going back to what I think you were getting at, Zach, was strategies in the classroom. In my math classroom in particular, you get into this social emotional script around math, both individually and as a class. Some students think I'm just not good at math, so I'm not going to even try. I'll [inaudible 00:30:00]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

So hard to hear.

Ralph:

... to identify as good at math to answer first, and then I'll try to follow in their footsteps. That can be a learning strategy, following someone else. But one of the best strategies I found for students to recognize their own talents in math is simply to stop talking and make sure everyone in the class doesn't shout out an answer. There are so many students I've learned over my 30-year career in the classroom that you give them 10 more seconds and they begin to recognize their own brilliance. Just as importantly, the other students in the class recognize those other students as brilliant.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

That distribution of talent around the classroom, which exists then gets recognized.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

Then the students start [inaudible 00:31:01] differently towards each other. Not that there's just one source of knowledge in the room, but that all the people in the room are sources of knowledge regardless of... This goes to socioeconomic background and race and everything else about who you identify as being the [inaudible 00:31:17] math student.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure. Sure.

Michael Holtz:

[inaudible 00:31:19]-

Ralph:

As we think about social emotional learning, I think that the social part is social as in our society and how people think about their roles, again, from gender to race to economics and all that.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

There's a reason why in teacher education, one of the baseline techniques you're supposed to be given to teachers is take the five seconds, ask the question, and just sit with it. My students always make fun of me for the millennial pause, which I have in my life because I'm over the age of 30, which is basically infinity to them. I could be anywhere between 30 and 80.

Michael Holtz:

Right. It's all the same. Yeah.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

They talk about how in their videos that they're all posting on YouTube or Instagram or whatever, and they're clipping out these tiny chunks of time just to gather people's attention. I think that's a great thing, and that's the brilliance of the playground. To extend the metaphor, everybody's got... There's not a one-size-fit-all approach to the playground. Some kids don't even want to play on the actual equipment. They just want to run around it. I think that's what a successful social emotional learning environment in the classroom can look like where students are able to participate in ways that they're developing confidence in. We as teachers need to structure that because they won't automatically all try out some of the hardest stuff. But the role-switching, the pausing [inaudible 00:33:02] are great techniques. They don't require resources. They just require presence of mind, which I guess is somewhat of a resource these days.

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Dr. Sharon:

I think that there's... The other thing I might add along those lines, you're making me think of a teacher that is just remarkable in social emotional learning. She's added the phrase yet.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes. Love that.

Dr. Sharon:

[inaudible 00:33:28] yet. I don't like math yet.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes.

Dr. Sharon:

She doesn't let a student get away with this idea that I can't do it. She'll come back with, "You can't do it yet." That shift to that very powerful phrase. I think if we can instill in our students that understanding that this is a journey of education. At this moment, yes, you can't do that hypotenuse, but not yet. You're going to be able to do it. Stick with me. I think it's a shift in the way we interact with our students to ensure that we're not putting them into set patterns, we get rid of our own biases, and we understand that every student has that potential for growth. By adding that simple word, yet, I think it allows us to cultivate and nurture a love of learning because it's not defeat, it's just not yet.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes.

Michael Holtz:

Yeah.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. I love that.

Michael Holtz:

I want to go back and take a math class because-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Let me in. Let me in.

Michael Holtz:

... I still don't like math yet.

Dr. Sharon:

What about chemistry? You love chemistry.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I'm sure.

Ralph:

Well, that could be a podcast all to itself about... Here at the Library Congress this year, I'm working with students who did not choose to pursue further math courses after a certain time, as we all do. Right?

Michael Holtz:

Sure.

Ralph:

As I've been working as a fellow at the library, I've deliberately taken the time to listen to their experiences about what drove them away from math.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh, wow.

Ralph:

A lot of it comes down to the topics we're talking about here. There wasn't that yet, Sharon. It was now or never.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

They didn't have that extra time. Yes, not everyone will go on to a math technical intensive field.

Michael Holtz:

Sure.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah.

Ralph:

But everyone at the library is looking to promote habits of citizenship and civics and all the other things we're talking about here in social emotional learning that we're all in communities and a nation together. When I see people turn away from math, I have to ask myself and ask them what caused that? Often it's not tied to-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

X or Y.

Ralph:

... [inaudible 00:36:04] but it's tied to the emotions around the content.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes. That's one of the hardest parts about the linearity of the education system, and the idea of promotion versus retention is become... Wouldn't that be a beautiful system to think about? Everyone views themselves on these C continua. I don't even know if that's a plural word. Continuums I suppose is probably better than continua. That's just totally made up probably. Anyways, everybody views themselves on their own different journeys. They are pursuing that. School is a part of that learning journey, but it will continue, right?

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

How far do you want to be when you're 18 before you try to leave your parents' house? Well, that's up to you. Rather than having to be... I have to get through English 1 so I can go to English 2. I have to go through chemistry so I can get to physics or vice versa. I think that that's a hard part to answer with the traditional system, but I do hope that maybe in the future there's some creative education arenas that try to tackle that because I do think it's an eminent problem. It's all over the place.

Michael Holtz:

Sure. That makes sense, and I know from my own experience. Zach, you talked about, and Ralph, I think you did too, of the pause. I remember back to my math class phase, it was who can answer the question first? I was the guy who needed six more seconds, and so I wasn't ever the person who raised his hand first. Not that that's why I dislike all things math necessarily-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Michael Holtz:

... but I excelled elsewhere, and so that's where I focused my attention.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

That's where you put your energy. Of course. Yeah. You're reinforcing. It's reinforced. Have y'all ever... I know I personally... This has happened to me I think more recently than maybe a while ago, but the idea when if you tell a student, "I think you're really good at this." I've had more kids come back at me and try to be like, "No, I'm not."

It's so interesting to me because I think about that relationship with the teacher and the role of the cheerleader, which is one of the many hats that teachers wear, and the motivator. Have you guys ever had that resistance from students or even other teachers on whether we should be teaching SEL? It feels... I think in this room, this virtual room, we all are on the same boat of this is something that is good for the whole child. But have you ever encountered that or from students? Have you ever encountered resistance in terms of teaching them how to be perseverant, how to be healthy humans?

Ralph:

I think that when it is perceived as an add-on, like we're going to social emotional training, then-

Michael Holtz:

I got you.

Ralph:

... as a teacher, I don't feel competent to directly teach the elements of social emotional learning.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure. Sure.

Ralph:

That's when I've seen resistance. When it's integrated into the subject matter, like Sharon and Zach and you're talking about, that's when people don't even notice that that's going on. They see it as good instruction. I guess I felt some pushback in the sense that it's the parents' job or it's the job at home for them to teach some of these things. When there's a, "Hey, I think you're encroaching on my parents' role by teaching them some of these things-"

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

... that's where we always have to I think when we're using these strategies be aware of our community and be aware of what parents are hoping for. That always leads to strong education anyway, but that I think is key when teachers do have pressure ever so more nowadays to produce certain numerical results-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Right.

Ralph:

... so anything that feels like... I don't feel competent to be a counselor to my students, but I do feel competent to talk to them as humans and then-

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Ralph:

... seek that extra support if I need.

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

It's almost an implicit counselor as opposed to an explicit counselor, right?

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

What do you think [inaudible 00:40:53]-

Michael Holtz:

Sharon, how about you?

Dr. Sharon:

So many thoughts.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I love that.

Dr. Sharon:

I think one the things that is important to recognize is that teachers do need professional support in this area. They may already have tools in their back pocket that they're not aware of. But to call it out, and again, the permission and the additional training is really a key component. To acknowledge as a school or as a district, this is what we're doing. We are going to do this, so you have the backing to move in that direction. We also know that this does improve academic scores.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes.

Dr. Sharon:

I think that we've seen 11% in rise. I think that was approximate in test scores of locations where these practices are taking place. I think that's really important to acknowledge. With respect to... You're not going to say that to a student per se-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

No.

Dr. Sharon:

... but you do have some information that you can share with the other teachers, your colleagues, as well as the parents, that this actually helps support, it's a basic need that we have. Then the last thing that I really want to make sure I share is I actually think restorative practices are an important component of student emotional [inaudible 00:42:20]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Absolute. Can you define that for [inaudible 00:42:22]-

Michael Holtz:

I was going to say talk about what that is?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

... I believe, that's awesome. Yeah. Good bring up.

Dr. Sharon:

Well, I think it's when there's... This is not an official definition. This is [inaudible 00:42:31]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure, sure, sure, sure. Yeah. You're not a dictionary.

Dr. Sharon:

It when there are conflicts, which we know that there's going to be interpersonal conflicts at the point everybody's in the same room and playing in the sandbox it's [inaudible 00:42:43]-

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah.

Dr. Sharon:

What is the pattern or the way that we're going to approach that is a [inaudible 00:42:50]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Resolution.

Dr. Sharon:

... practice.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes. Yeah.

Dr. Sharon:

The first step is really to listen to each other. Then you can move to the empathy, and then you actually don't shy away from it. You actually talk about it and determine what is... By listening to each other, you have this ability to then be empathetic so that you can actually then address the issue and the conflict and reach a resolution that is good for all members involved. The key component of that is actually beginning to listen to each other. I think we can do that in all of our classes.

That's a really... I've, with my students, asked them to put their hand down, and that I'll call on people because at the point you raise your hand you're focused now on what you're going to be saying, and you're not listening to the conversation. We know that even now, here. It's human nature that you shut off your listening at the point you have something to say. I've given students a little notepad so that they can write it all down so that they have permission to do so before sharing on them. I think that those are two really nice practices that we can do. With respect to restorative practices, I was shocked that 45% of our colleges are actually using restorative practices in their conflicts.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh, wow.

Dr. Sharon:

This is actually a trend that's moving forward.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Moving up.

Dr. Sharon:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah.

Michael Holtz:

[inaudible 00:44:22]-

Dr. Sharon:

We need to address our social emotional learning in this world where there's so much diverse thinking, we need to come together as a human race. In order to do so, we need a process to help us do this. I think that's where social emotional learning and restorative practices comes into play.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. I'm fortunate to have been... I've had training on that, professional development on restorative practice. I don't know... That wasn't at my first school though. That wasn't in college or right out of college. That was later on in my career.

Dr. Sharon:

Yeah. You should share your meaning because-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

No. No.

Dr. Sharon:

... [inaudible 00:44:57]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

It's exactly what you said. I was like, "Oh my gosh, how did I not think of that?" That's such a great tool. It applies in all levels, but it is really just about... Again, it's almost like a forced pause to hold that tactic in a group setting or in a small group setting where everyone has to be inclusively making a decision about something. I think that that's a beautiful... Again, it's about being in that room with the people, recognizing that your education as a student or as a teacher is a part of the education of the building or of the class. Recognizing that we're all in this space together. We're all learning collectively. Man, that's good. That's good, Sharon. What about you, Ralph? What about you? Have you encountered restorative practice before? Or have you guys used it in your classes?

Ralph:

Not specifically, but as a school, the last school I worked at, and I think the school before that too, middle... I'll go back to that... I was thinking of middle school, but I'll go back to that kindergarten poster that I'm going to find someplace.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yes. Please. I want it.

Dr. Sharon:

For sure.

Ralph:

What goes on when people are together on the playground or in the classroom and learning to cooperate. When something happens, whether it be in the outside world or in the hallway or in a classroom, that we know it's okay to all have different interpretations of an event.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Absolutely.

Ralph:

That keeping a community together takes empathy, and it also takes rules, and rules if we've developed them together tend to help

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

In general, right?

Ralph:

We do live in an environment right now where I think building on what Sharon said, we speak before we think. We're in a rush for results, and we expect [inaudible 00:47:29] we're trying to out... We're trying to go viral before someone else does [inaudible 00:47:39] say things for effect that the calming strategies... Again, my experience with it is whole school. We just learned that the whole ninth grade is having a social problem. We're going to pause-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Everybody comes to the auditorium.

Ralph:

Yeah. Well, that's an interesting point, Zach. There was... My own 1970s, yeah, we'd all come to the-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

... auditorium and we'd all get yelled at and then told-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Right. Right.

Michael Holtz:

Don't do that again.

Ralph:

... [inaudible 00:48:17] after school, because one person didn't-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Clean up after themselves. Yeah.

Ralph:

... but we moved [inaudible 00:48:23]-

Michael Holtz:

Here's your pink slip to the principal's office.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah.

Ralph:

Yeah. Instead, we give students opportunities, I think as we've been talking about throughout our time together this podcast, is bring everyone together. But not in a punitive way, but in a restorative way that emphasizes our community responsibilities and connections.

Dr. Sharon:

Absolutely.

Michael Holtz:

[inaudible 00:48:53] is there advice that you would give to a teacher who wants to begin incorporating? Maybe they're a new teacher and they haven't put SEL skills to the test or want to start integrating it in the classroom, but maybe they're not sure or they haven't encountered that yet. Is there advice that you would have for a teacher looking to do that?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I can lead this unless you guys are ready. I have one that I definitely love.

Ralph:

I have one I love too, but you go first, Zach.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I love mine just as much as you, I guess. All right. When I was in my first years of teaching, just fresh out of my master's program, and I was trying to incorporate this stuff and it just wasn't landing. My kids just didn't... They didn't absorb it. It wasn't that they were at adversarial towards it, but they just didn't understand the idea of group decision making or self-awareness. Then eventually I had to sit them all down. I was like, "Y'all, we are working on say self-awareness. In the lab space, you have to be self-aware, you have to be aware of your environment, you have to be aware of your group mates, whatever." They're like, "Proffitt, you should have just told us that." I was like, "Wait, hold up." I know Ralph was talking about, which I do think is an important sentiment, that teaching social emotional learning as a silo I don't think is necessarily as effective.

But I have transitioned as I've gone on to a more explicit instruction just of basically telling the students as we're doing an integrated activity this is about resilience. Maybe this activity is slightly harder. Or this is about, say, self-management or social awareness. This might be more of a community-focused activity that we're working on, but then it helps the students understand why it doesn't look the way that classes looked every other day. It really has made a big difference in the way that they reflect on their growth in these capacities. Because in order for them to have some understanding of their growth, they have to know how to talk to themselves about it, how to think about it. Saying, "I am more disciplined," or, "I am more perseverant," or, "I have better social awareness at the end of this class is a..." You have to teach them that terminology. It's not just vocab, but I found that being explicit within an integrated activity really changes the way that it lands for teachers [inaudible 00:51:44]-

Michael Holtz:

Why are you pausing, Zach?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I know. They get so mad.

Michael Holtz:

I'm just kidding.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I love it. I love it. That's so real though. They really do get mad. How about you, Ralph? What do you got?

Ralph:

Well, that element of... The reverse happened to me, instead of thinking about it I was going to say I became engrossed in what you were saying. That's the goal that you want, right?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure, sure, sure.

Ralph:

You want this listening to go on. What really resonated for me was the part that you said about explicitly naming certain things so that students can identify them and then they can learn to set their own goals. The original question was how do we help someone new to this? I'm thinking both about students being new to this and-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

... teachers being new to this. For students, having them write down a sentence that tries to restate the thing that you've told them, to put that in their own words. Then for teachers, I think it comes back to the skills of observation and attention and listening that we want as STEM teachers to have everyone practice. I suggest to teachers go and watch this other teacher. You're not a student in the class, so you can simply observe and write down what you notice, what's going-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Audit.

Ralph:

... on in the classroom, and write down what you wonder. That close observation, we as teachers often don't... I don't know about you, Sharon, but we often don't have enough time to watch each other.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Gosh. That's the dream.

Ralph:

That's always been the best professional development I've ever had.

Michael Holtz:

Sure.

Ralph:

If I was new to something, anything, but particularly social emotional, I would take the time to use what we do at the library, it's observe, reflect, and question. Then we do this [inaudible 00:53:47] science and math as well. Really, we all think... A lot of people think they know how to teach because they've been in classrooms, right?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Ralph:

But taking the time to look at what's going on and take explicit notes about what was and then discuss it later, that's what helps you incorporate it into your own practice.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I like it. That's great. Great advice.

Michael Holtz:

[inaudible 00:54:14]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Teacher observations, co-observations, peer observation's central to, I think, development. How about you, Dr. Sharon?

Dr. Sharon:

Dr. Sharon. I really love the naming and being very intentional with the awakening of the student and yourself of what you're addressing. I also really love the making observations and then reflecting and questioning. I think those strategies are remarkable for any individual to walk away with. My additional thoughts were to use the resources at your school and at your district. The counselors really have a handle on this. There might be a point where they could suggest an activity that would then support more empathy or support more self-awareness or support... I think leaning into some of the staff. Sometimes we do operate in silos, and we're thinking we're a STEM teacher and we don't need to really talk to the counselor about strategy, but they love that. [inaudible 00:55:29]-

Michael Holtz:

Ask me. Ask me. Ask me.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

That's why I'm here.

Dr. Sharon:

Not about an individual student, they want to know [inaudible 00:55:35]-

Michael Holtz:

No. Yeah. Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

... and even our administrators, this is a beautiful way to partner with administrators. I think reading up about this, even in some of the articles that I've read, you can get controversial thoughts.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Sure.

Dr. Sharon:

But I think we also have to just trust our gut as great teachers. You want to move a student. You want to move your class. The skills that our world are looking for are collaboration and communication and creativity and caring. Those are what companies are looking for. They're not going to really hear so much if you forgot that the mitochondria has [inaudible 00:56:23]-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

May or may not be the powerhouse of the cell, right?

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Dr. Sharon:

... at the forefront. What is going to be important is that you're eager to learn that you're in a safe place, that you're willing to communicate, you're willing to care. I think that if there's ever resistance to this idea with a new teacher or with an administration or with a student, it's understanding these are the skills that probably PISA put out way back when. They're the 21st century skills that date Ralph and I a little bit, but were core in shifting the way education has gone in the last 25 years. It's where we're landing. It's what a student needs to be a part of our world and to have confidence to move through it.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I love it.

Michael Holtz:

Awesome.

Dr. Sharon:

Yeah.

Michael Holtz:

Well, I know we could have this conversation for another hour solidly, right?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah.

Michael Holtz:

But I'm going to bring playtime to an end.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh, no. Recess is over.

Michael Holtz:

Recess is over-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

[inaudible 00:57:31]-

Michael Holtz:

... but with one... I have one question for everyone, and this is a question I love to ask at the end of every podcast. The question is, what brings you joy? Sharon, I'm going to ask you that question first.

Dr. Sharon:

Love that. What a great question. I am always joyful in the classroom or at school when I see that aha in a student's eyes and they just twinkle. When a child's eyes twinkle and they laugh and are enjoying themselves, that brings me joy. Then I think personally, anytime I connect to nature, especially the ocean, I always have a smile on my face.

Michael Holtz:

Nice.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Good. Yeah. That's [inaudible 00:58:19]-

Michael Holtz:

I love that. Ralph, how about you?

Ralph:

Well, it's funny, somehow during the podcast, I don't remember if this started before we started recording or during, we started talking about playgrounds and we started talking about play.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I love it.

Ralph:

I think when I look around and I see little kids jumping and skipping and pointing at a bird or doing things like that, what brings me the most joy is play and doing something that is... It's a human desire that I think as we sometimes get older don't devote enough time to, to simply do something for the joy of it. Yeah. What I found, if I can say, a close number two is play connects people so [inaudible 00:59:15] always brings me joy. Sometimes I've introduced two people and they go off, and I may never talk to either of them again, but it brings [inaudible 00:59:24] some new connection has been formed.

Michael Holtz:

I love it. Zach, how about you?

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Oh my gosh. Recently, the world is really full of joy in DC, talking about how people are getting connected. The public transport system in our city during the cherry blossom season, which is the season in which we're recording this podcast, is overloaded to put it very lightly. It is field trips. It is out-of-towners. It is people who don't speak English. It is people who have no idea, have never ridden the metro before.

Michael Holtz:

Right.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

It is crazy. I have actually used this example. I don't know how this metaphor is going to... It's just going to keep extending itself, that it's like... Being in DC in late March is like being in a kindergarten classroom. You have all of these people who are just all of a sudden unaware of where they are. They're looking and they're distracted. There's all these bells and whistles going on. You're constantly finding these fully grown men who you're just like, "Can I help you find the right escalator to go up? Your map is upside down," type moments, right?

Michael Holtz:

Right. Yeah.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

You're just trying to get these people to the shiny thing, which are these beautiful trees. But I just walk around with a smile on my face because of how it's total chaos, but also just such joy.

Michael Holtz:

People are open it sounds like.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

They're so happy to. They want to just talk. They want to be like, "This is my first time in DC," or, "We've seen the cherry blossoms every year for 40 years." I'm like, "Wow, that's a long time."

Michael Holtz:

Awesome.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

That's a lot of joy. That's got to be-

Michael Holtz:

That's great.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

... [inaudible 01:01:13] how about you, Michael? Where are you at?

Michael Holtz:

You probably can't hear, but my dog is in her bed behind me and she's snoring. It brings me joy when I hear her snoring because I know that she's happy and contented. As a dog dad, that makes me happy.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

I think dogs are just... They're just pigs in disguise, really.

Michael Holtz:

I think so too.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

They just are constantly making some pig-like noise that I just... Can't fool me.

Michael Holtz:

Absolutely.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

You can't fool me.

Michael Holtz:

Well, and she eats like a pig too, so-

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. There you go. Yeah.

Michael Holtz:

It makes perfect sense.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Love it.

Michael Holtz:

Well, thank you all so much for this time together. It has been a beautiful conversation, and I look forward to having other people hear how much fun we've had talking about social emotional learning today. Just thank you so much for your time. I greatly appreciate it.

Zachary Minchow-Proffitt:

Yeah. Thank you, Michael.

Dr. Sharon:

Thank you very much.

Speaker 2:

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