

## **We Need Social-Emotional Learning and Project-Based Learning In our Schools**

As a retired educator who has worked as a teacher, coach, alternative school director, district administrator and college instructor, I have concluded that our public schools are ignoring an important aspect of learning. We need to teach young people to understand their emotions, and to be empathetic and compassionate leaders. It was with this belief that we created The Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (CCSR) in Medford, Massachusetts.

The mission of the CCSR is to incorporate **Social–Emotional Learning (SEL)** in our schools, thereby developing responsible global leaders/citizens that will be positive contributors to society and will work to address important social issues. Using the **Project-Based Learning (PBL)** methodology, students gain knowledge, develop empathy/compassion, learn to problem solve, and become effective leaders. Since PBL incorporates real-life experiences, learning has a lasting positive effect on their self-image, self-confidence, ability to empathize, and understanding of others.

### **Project-Based Learning (PBL)**

*”Project-based learning is rooted in a constructivist, student-centered theoretical framework. Learning is actively constructed according to experiences from engagement with the environment, with peers, and with reality. This philosophy views learning as a social activity and is fostered through self-directed and student-initiated interactive engagement. As such, students learn problem solving as a lifelong skill, collaborate, and engage in discussions with peers as they navigate through their experiences with content and investigate the problems they are learning about.*

*Project-based learning is a highly motivating instructional approach that captivates students' interest and empowers them to engage in the academic content while enhancing their linguistic proficiency. With project-based learning, students first make inquiries about something in their reality that affects them and then investigate these inquiries. The fundamental bases for project-based learning are the questions about problems or issues of interest that students begin to form. As students search for the answers to these questions, they are motivated to conduct research focused around these questions. By working collaboratively with their peers to answer the driving questions, they continue to learn academic content.*

*Cooperative learning is necessary to maximize student engagement throughout the process. Cooperative learning benefits .... learners because they are able to discuss issues with peers, thereby increasing language acquisition and development.*

*Cooperative grouping*

*\* provides opportunities for students to communicate with one another;*

- \* *enhances instructional conversations;*
- \* *decreases anxiety, as the affective filter is low;*
- \* *develops social, academic, and communication skills;*
- \* *enhances self-confidence and self-esteem through individual contributions and achievement of group goals;*
- \* *improves individual and group relations by helping individuals learn to clarify, assist, and challenge one another's ideas; and*
- \* *develops proficiency in English by providing students with rich language experiences that integrate speaking, listening, reading, and writing”*

*(Calderon, 1991; Christian, 1995; Rivera & Zehler, 1991)*

### **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)**

*“When students are struggling and school performance is poor, they are more likely to find school and learning as a source of anxiety, manifesting in diminished self-efficacy, motivation, engagement, and connectedness with school,” says Dr. Christina Cipriano. Therefore, when it comes to our nation’s most at-risk students, receiving SEL training in the classroom can make a huge difference in preparing them for a healthy and successful life well beyond school*

*One of the most extensive studies of the long-term impacts of SEL was completed by researchers from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); Loyola University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of British Columbia. Their work reviewed over 213 studies on the impacts of SEL. According to CASEL, they found that students who were part of SEL programs showed 11 percentile-point gains in academic achievement over those who were not a part of such programs. Compared to students who did not participate in SEL programs, students participating in SEL programs also showed:*

- *Improved classroom behavior*
- *An increased ability to manage stress and depression*
- *Better attitudes about themselves, others, and school”*

*“The Real and Lasting Impacts of Social-Emotional Learning with At-Risk Students.”*

Jennifer Gunn - July 25, 2018

*“Promoting Social and Emotional Learning defines “social and emotional competence” as “the ability to understand, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of one’s life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth*

*and development.” Research shows that SEL in the classroom has long-term effects into adulthood. A recent study by the American Public Health Foundation found connections between social-emotional skills taught in kindergarten and positive adult outcomes including “education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health.”*

*When students explicitly learn and practice kindness, serotonin levels increase, leaving them more open to academic learning. “The neuroscience and social science research is clear,” says Dr. Patty O’Grady in Positive Psychology in the Classroom. “Kindness changes the brain by the experience of kindness. Children and adolescents do not learn kindness by only thinking about it and talking about it. Kindness is best learned by feeling it so that they can reproduce it.” Research by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development Task Force states that academic learning is “possible only after students’ social, emotional and physical needs have been met.” Therefore, teaching kids about empathy, kindness and compassion in school is essential to the development of social-emotional intelligence in young children and adolescents, and this social-emotional learning sets them free to achieve academic success.”*

“Teaching Children Kindness & Empathy Using Social-Emotional Learning”

Jennifer Gunn - June 15, 2018

## **The Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (CCSR)**

In Medford Public Schools, we created a program that incorporates Social–Emotional Learning and Project-Based Learning to develop empathetic student leaders who would work to make the world a better place. Students who participate in the CCSR:

- Develop important leadership skills
- Increase their self -image and self-confidence
- Reduce the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)
- Feel the powerful effect of helping others

Below are a few samples student (K-12) projects—please visit our web page [www.medfordccsr.org](http://www.medfordccsr.org) to see a description of the more than one hundred and fifty projects that have been completed.

- Initiating and passing a ban on plastic bags in Medford
- Raising \$4,000 to create a permanent monument to enslaved people who died in Medford
- Installing a 3D crosswalk at the Brooks Elementary School
- Collecting and delivering a truck full of supplies to victims of Hurricane Harvey in Houston
- Organizing Medford's Diversity Day—a student-run festival to celebrate diversity and inclusion
- Starting The English Learners Give Back Program, which created a user-friendly website where English Learners can learn how to perform basic tasks around Medford High School

- Establishing the Restorative Justice Project, providing an opportunity for students to talk about all sides of a conflict and be accountable for their actions

It is important that educators carefully consider the importance of integrating SEL programs founded on a PBL structure. The CCSR is a program that meets this criterion.

We welcome any questions or comments on how the CCSR works. Please visit our web page at [www.medfordccsr.org](http://www.medfordccsr.org).

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**Bio: Richard H Trotta**

Richard has worked in public education as a teacher and an administrator. Prior to becoming an administrator, he taught secondary Social Studies. As the Director of Media, Technology and Fine Arts for the Medford Public Schools., he supervised a number of district wide programs: instructional technology, library services, media services, art and music. In addition, he played an active role in curriculum development, professional development, school to career and gifted and talented programs. Richard has authored and managed numerous state and federal grants. He has taught courses and workshops at Salem State College, Simmons College, Harvard University, American International College, area school districts and professional conferences. He served on the Board of Directors for Youth Tech Entrepreneurs, a non-profit that provided school districts with a project-based curriculum, incorporating technology and business skills. A Principal of an Alternative School Program. In 2012, he was awarded a grant from The Bloomberg Foundation and created The Center for Citizenship and Social Responsibility (CCSR), an afterschool program that develops student leaders who work to make the world a better place to live ([www.medfordccsr.org](http://www.medfordccsr.org)). Since then, he was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Cummings Foundation and \$125,000 from the Krystle Campbell Community Betterment Project (Boston Foundation) to expand the work of the CCSR. Richard received his Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree from Northeastern University. He earned a CAGS certificate from Boston University and attended the University of Massachusetts in Lowell as a doctoral candidate.

