Teaching the Way People Learn

Module 4: Establishing the Emotional Climate for Learning

This handout accompanies the video for Module 4. Use the handout to review information from the video and to record discussion.

-- **Section 1** --

- In Module 4 we will focus our attention on the critical role that emotions play in learning.
- For much of educational history, critics have dismissed the role of emotions in learning.
- Today's neuroscientists are breaking new ground in helping us understand why emotion is an important learning variable.
- Emotions, thinking, and learning are all linked. Emotions organize and create our reality.
- The classroom and the school provide endless opportunities for emotional experiences, and students' brains will be altered by these experiences.
- Twenty years of neuroscience and cognitive research findings-   Emotions…
  - constitute the passion for learning
  - help orchestrate our attentional priorities
  - support either persistence or retreat
  - are sources of information about the outside world
  - evoke necessary empathy, support, or fear
  - associate our learning with either pain or pleasure
  - help us make meaning out of our learning, work, and lives
  - improve social problem solving
  - push the pursuit of rewarded behavior
  - allow us to enjoy and even celebrate our learning success

Stop & Jot 1: Think back into your own school experiences. Think about a time when you may have been publicly embarrassed by an insensitive remark by a teacher or classmate. Think about how you felt immediately after the incident. Were you able to concentrate on the learning task after that event? Did it affect how you performed in that teacher's class in the subsequent days or even months? What elements do you remember most about the experience?

-- **Section 2** --

- The brain's emotional response must begin with the limbic system.
- The amygdala is engaged not only in implicit emotional reaction but also in explicit emotional learning.
- The involvement of the amygdala in declarative memories explains why we remember emotionally-charged events better than ordinary day-to-day occurrences.
- A sensory signal arrives at the emotional brain a split second before reaching the cognitive brain.
- The emotional brain is wired to dominate brain output (i.e., "amygdala hijack") effects of stress on learning.
- Research has demonstrated a high correlation of childhood stress associated with poverty.
- Researchers have found relationships between parental nurturing and memory development and between environmental stimulation and language development.
- Although mild stress in specific contexts may enhance performance and recall, prolonged stress appears to reduce the ability to acquire, retain, and recall information.
- The most frequent emotion identified by students was anxiety accounting for up to 25% of all emotions reported.
- Students with high anxiety also have high cortisol levels, a hormone related to stress.
- Continual stress may cause individuals not to worry or care about their performance in school, which in turn leads to poor academic performance.

Stop and Jot #2 Why might it be important for educators to know and understand students' emotional triggers? What are some ways to obtain this information from students?

-- **Section 3** --

- As there are detrimental effects of negative emotion on learning, there are also beneficial effects of positive emotion on learning.
- Positive emotions influence broad cognitive associations and result in better performance on creative thinking measures.

- Positive emotions have been shown to increase students' scope of attention, global thinking, and increased thought-action responses meaning describing an action that the student would perform given the emotion.
- In setting up an emotional climate for learning, an important factor to consider is the motivation to learn.
- Individuals who are typically motivated by achievement goals perform better when a task is presented as achievement-oriented compared with when that task is presented as fun-oriented. The reverse pattern is also true.
- Adolescence is a time of rapid physical and emotional changes paired with challenging social changes.
- The peer group typically replaces the adult as the source of approval.
- The tendency for risk-taking and thrill-seeking behavior increases from the onset of puberty into early adulthood.
- Understanding and preventing sleep deprivation is critical as growing evidence demonstrates that lack of sleep can create emotional as well as cognitive and physical health problems.
- Teachers who enjoy working with adolescents cannot help but notice the many benefits of the high-intensity feeling that are part of this developmental period.
- Teachers must be aware of their powerful role in establishing and maintaining a positive and productive environment in the classroom and school.
- Research tells us that behavior-specific praise is more effective in reinforcing and shaping behaviors than generalized praise.
- Children who are praised for being smart fixate on performance, shying away from taking risks and meeting potential failure. On the other hand, children who are praised for their efforts try harder and persist with tasks longer.
- The key to instilling a growth mindset according to Dweck is teaching kids that their brains are like muscles that can be strengthened through hard work and persistence.

Stop and Jot 3: What do we mean by behavior-specific praise? Why might behavior-specific praise be more effective in reinforcing and shaping positive behaviors than generalized praise?

-- **Section 4** --

- Establishing classroom routines let students know what is expected of them academically and socially in the context of the classroom.
- Using quick review drills or journal writing or a do-now activity is a routine that many teachers use daily to get the lesson started

- Many teachers effectively use workstations to provide students with information and materials.
- Rituals that are quick and fun such as chants, hand signals, or clapping patterns help to motivate and engage students and to build a sense of group identity.
- Rituals can also serve as powerful social messages that become the standard for peer social interactions and work expectations.
- Celebrations go a long way in giving children a sense of belonging and building group cohesiveness.
- Coping with and managing emotionally-charged events outside the classroom is necessary for creating and maintaining a positive classroom environment.
- Although certainly some situations will require immediate intervention from the teacher, it appears that acknowledging the emotion and redirecting the student may be the most effective approach.
- Creative teachers find ways to assess how students' emotions might influence their engagement in classroom activities.

Stop & Jot 4: According to research, "children who were instructed to disengage performed better on educational tasks than those who were instructed to process their feelings or those who received no acknowledgment of the emotional event" (44). How might this look in practice? Describe how you might redirect a student entering class after an emotional event.

--- **Section 5** ---

- Research demonstrates the importance of a connection to a caring adult for learning and social development.
- Evidence exists that adult nurturing actually alters brain physiology and structure.
- Adolescents who reported a feeling of connectedness through the presence of a caring adult in school were less likely to be involved in every risk behavior studied
- Positive student-teacher interactions correlated with students' reports of liking school and predicted social and academic outcomes.
- Hardiman has the following suggestions for promoting connectedness of children in school

- provide consistent classroom expectations and fair, non-aggressive strategies to manage disciplinary processes
- design instructional activities that are rigorous, engaging, differentiated, and meaningful.
- involve all students in the care of the classroom.
- create opportunities for peer tutoring and cooperative group work.
- communicate positive messages to children and parents through notes, Awards, and phone calls texts or emails
- assure that each child has an opportunity to be called on during class and participate through a unique contribution such as designing a bulletin board or decorating workspace
- create individualized learning goals for each student
- roleplay ways to resolve conflicts, especially through content-based activities such as literature or social studies lesson
- establish opportunities for cross-age interactions such as content-based tutoring, theater and arts programs, and library or study skills sessions.
- model warmth and kindness in the classroom. [Or in Jesus' words, "In the same way, let your light shine before others." (Matt. 5:16)]

- Offering students choices relating to the content and process of learning has been shown to provide a sense of agency or control over outcomes and is associated with increased levels of motivation and achievement.
- Given appropriate guidance and structure, teachers can motivate performance by allowing choices in content, methods, and assessment.
- Research suggests that a child's ability to recognize and interpret emotional cues has long-term effects on social behavior and academic competence.
- SEL programs include fostering awareness of emotions, regulation of emotions through stress management, developing understanding empathy toward others, building relationships, and responsible decision-making.
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Stop and Jot 5: What does a social and emotional learning program (SEL) look and sound like in a Lutheran school?

Go and Grow

Without referring back to the video or handout, what are **three** valuable points you take away from this module?

What are **two** things you would like to do "tomorrow" with the information you learned?

Assignment: What is **one** question you have and would like to research? For the next time you meet, prepare a brief summary of your findings to share with others who may have the same question.