

Chapter 5

Teaching Communication Skills to Foster Social–Emotional Learning

ABSTRACT

Communication is an essential 21st century learning skill and is ranked high among a job candidate’s “must have” skills and qualities. In the global workplace, communication is a key element in effective collaboration and teamwork. Employers are seeking candidates who are adept in various forms of communication and show signs of empathy to others by the manner they listen and respond. Communication skills are in alignment with social-emotional learning. Through effective communication, young people can build positive relationships with others to collaborate, and they learn to be self and socially aware through effective listening and mutual perspective taking. Educators must begin to think about the real-world challenges of communication skills and how to incorporate practical strategies that address these skills in their daily lessons to optimize student success in their daily and academic lives as well as their future lives in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Being able to communicate is one of the most important skills in life. Without communication, we cannot share or exchange with others our thoughts and ideas, our feelings and emotions, or our desires and needs. Having the ability to

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communicate also helps us to pass on information to others and to understand or interpret what is being said to us. Even infants, in their earliest stages, recognize that they can communicate their needs to their parents or caregivers through their own sounds like crying or cooing, their facial expressions, and their body movements.

Being able to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas are factors for the standards and guidelines for the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA CCSS). In the Introduction of the ELA CCSS, the outcomes and/or qualities of the student who successfully meets the standards are described: (1) demonstrating independence, where the student becomes a “self-directed learner” and can successfully seek and use resources that will help them in their academic work; (2) building strong content knowledge, where the student refines his/her communication skills to learn new ideas/research; (3) responding to the various demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline, where the student can successfully pick up on visual cues, paying attention to his/her audience, and deciding whether or not to be formal or informal in speaking or writing; (4) being able to comprehend and critique, where the student is an open-minded but “discerning” listener; (5) using technology and digital media, where the student recognizes that through technology, their communication skills can be enhanced; and (6) understanding other perspectives and cultures, where the student not only recognizes but appreciates other perspectives and cultures in the 21st century classroom and workplace. These are skills that have high importance for all teachers to teach across all disciplines and all grade levels with the aim for students to be college and career ready. One can easily understand why communication is at the forefront as one of the 21st century learning skills. A 2018 survey organized by the National Association of Colleges and Employees revealed that verbal communication skills are ranked first among a job candidate’s “must-have skills and qualities (NACE, 2018). At the forefront in the 21st century, communication skills must be further enhanced in today’s schools for student success in the workplace.

BACKGROUND

Communication, like the other Four C’s, have different definitions and meanings cited by educators and experts in the field. Brinkley et al (2010) defined communication as a means of focusing on ways of working together through knowledge of language, skills (e.g., having the ability to listen), and

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