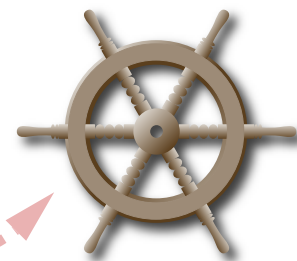


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Charting Your Course for Empathy, Self Regulation and Resiliency

by Betty-Jean Aucoin, NSTU Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

I had the opportunity to join 9,000 plus educators at the 70th Annual Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference (ASCD) over the March Break. Educators had the opportunity to learn, share and grow together. There were over 350 sessions offered to support all educators in their needs, interests and practices. I attended a full-day session on the development of self-regulation, empathy and resilience along with many workshops on topics such as Differentiated Instruction and Assessment and Supporting New Teachers. I am unable to provide an overview of all sessions within this article; however, my full-day session left me with a lot to think about and act upon in support of students, teachers and school communities.

The full-day session with Dr. Bob Sornson on Developing Self-Regulation, Empathy and Resilience was of great interest to educators around the world. Many educators have noticed that more children are coming to school lacking the ability to self-regulate, showcase empathy and practice resilience.

As a new teacher, 28 years ago, I taught a Primary, Grade 1/2 multi-aged classroom. The majority of students arrived with the foundation of self-regulation skills in place. Children develop the foundational skills of self-regulation in the first five years of life. (Blair, 2000). I joined parents and guardians in supporting students' ongoing development of empathy, self-regulation and resilience.

Currently, I now enter classrooms across this province where I see teachers working with large numbers of students who have little or no self-regulation, who are unable to understand the feelings of others and who are frustrated in completing simple tasks. Teachers are now asked to focus more in these areas to assist children in self-regulation. Children who are able to self-regulate are able to calm themselves and persist, even if things are difficult or boring. They focus on the right things, delay gratification, are able to calm themselves, notice the feelings of others and respect adult authority. Regulating one's thinking, emotions and behaviour is critical for success in school, work and life. (Mind in Making, 2010).

Throughout the session, we discussed how to raise, support and teach resilient children. Many of the suggestions reminded me of my own upbringing and school years. At home and in school we should ensure the following variables exist: clear consistent routines; use of respectful speech rather than arguing; opportunities for thinking time; ensure that children have responsibility for chores and completion of tasks; notice positive behaviours more than negative ones; teach children to solve problems on their own; celebrate mistakes and learn from them and most importantly model self-regulation and resilience. Simple, but it takes the effort and commitment of parents and teachers to persevere and to follow through.

Later in the session we discussed the social emotional skill that precedes all



Betty-Jean Aucoin (far right) is shown with Dr. Sornson (front middle) and NSTU member Jeanne Rhodenizer (back row, far right) and North American colleagues at the ASCD conference.

others: Empathy. Children who learn empathy are able to connect appropriately to others. They care about how others feel and help one another in good times and in bad. Children who are able to empathize with others showcase positive social skills and are successful in school, work and life.

One of the needs of empathy is security. The home and school environments need spaces that provide children security. We need opportunities for children to hear stories of others and how others feel. Children who show empathy are more often willing to stand up for their peers and for themselves. We want children to feel for others and to react in supporting them when they are hurting or being bullied.

Children who develop self-regulation,

resilience and empathy are leaders in our schools, our communities and beyond. As educators and school communities, it is imperative that we join together in understanding how children learn and sustain these critical social emotional skills. It is also important that we impart this knowledge to the home and school community to ensure all children have the opportunity to learn from their first teacher—their parent or guardian. As a parent, I thank the many teachers who join me throughout the school year to provide guidance and support to my son. As a teacher, I acknowledge that his success, and the success of all children, relies on both foundations of home and school.

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