



SIX GAME-CHANGING SKILLS TO INSTILL IN COACHES, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Though some may call them “soft skills,” these six game-changing social and emotional skills are as hard as any others that serious thinkers need. In our era of information overload, we depend on them to shed light on the key challenges our world faces.

- 1. Listening well** enables us to hear information, process it, and respond to others in generative ways. It especially attunes us to cultural and individual differences in how others communicate meaning. We learn to expand our awareness as we listen more consciously to learners, tuning our attention to small signals that indicate their mindsets, challenges, or states of receptivity.
- 2. Effective feedback** opens the door to lifelong learning and advancement. Seeking feedback increases our awareness and understanding of standards for excellence in a field. Receiving feedback opens us to ongoing inquiry and new perspectives. Offering feedback gives us practice in a learner-centered approach, using questions that invite thinking and reflection.
- 3. Perspective-taking** lays the ground for effective collaboration and communication in personal interactions, academic inquiry, the workplace, and civic life. It supports empathy and respect, drawing on our awareness of self and others, our understanding of other cultures, and our recognition that learners develop and change over time.

4. Effective collaboration stands undisputed as an indispensable crosscutting skill for success in academics, the workplace, civic life, and interpersonal relationships. The process requires respect, empathy, attunement to individual differences, and alignment with agreed-on objectives. And it accustoms us to inclusive practices in making decisions, planning, fulfilling different roles, and assessing results.

5. Self-management behaviors help us direct and regulate our social, emotional, and intellectual actions in positive ways, whether independently or with others. When we offer nonjudgmental feedback or introduce new skills and strategies, we encourage them to manage their own actions: recognizing progress as well as setbacks, reflecting on possibilities, and deciding on next steps.

6. Goal-setting connects and stabilizes our learning process. It requires us to reflect on our prior actions and work, assess our progress toward specific outcomes, attend to feedback, articulate our next learning target, and decide what actions align with what we envision. In the short term and the long term, setting goals trains us to set attainable targets: neither too easy nor too difficult.

Addressing these crucial aspects of learning can prove a game-changer for school leaders, mentors, teachers, and students—transforming the academic experience and raising the levels of mastery for every learner involved.

CASE STUDY: THESE GAME-CHANGING SKILLS IN ACTION

As she began her second year of teaching middle-school social studies, Anita was worried.

She hadn't yet met her incoming seventh graders, but she had seen their lackluster scores on the state reading assessments they took the previous spring. And in the staff planning sessions before school opened, her principal had been pushing hard for a laser-like focus on informational text and persuasive writing.

"I just know these kids won't buy into that," Anita lamented to her mentor teacher, Joann. (Both names are pseudonyms.) "I sometimes think they only come to school to see their friends!"

"Hmm," mused Joann, as she paged through Anita's class rosters. "I wonder if your students might start the year by investigating that."

Three days later, Anita stood smiling in the door of her classroom. As each seventh-grader crossed the threshold, she introduced herself, asked the student's name, and handed over a nametag she had created beforehand. "Nice to meet you!" she said warmly to each.

The "Do Now" writing assignment was already on the whiteboard: "What was your favorite school experience ever? What was the one that frustrated you most?"

By the end of the first week of school, her students had written and revised a short personal reflection, and paired it with a digital photo of a person or scene that mattered a lot to them. And Anita had joined all her students in a "Community Handshake," a circle activity where the goal was to smile, make friendly eye contact with a handshake, and recall the name of every person in their class.

WHY KNOWING THE LEARNER MATTERS SO MUCH

In an era where academic success counts more than ever, why does it matter to draw our students into such personal explorations? The answer lies in two critical competencies that undergird all learning:

- Our **awareness of self and others**, and
- Our **beliefs and attitudes about our potential and capacity as learners**.

Once Anita's social studies students felt they belonged to a classroom community, she engaged them in inquiry about their larger community. What would they change about it, if they could? What would it take for those changes to happen? If they wanted to be part of that change, what did they need to know and be able to do? What first step will they take?

COACHING FOR A 'LEARNING MINDSET'

Working in teams, Anita's seventh graders started to practice the skills of social scientists—and of empowered citizens in a democracy. If they didn't know the answer to a problem, they began to see exploring possibilities as a normal part of the process. The way Anita framed their learning tasks reflected her belief that "mistakes" simply offered another opportunity to grow in what they knew and could do.

As they developed that "learning mindset," their teacher saw a pronounced effect on their engagement and their performance. And as Anita came to know the strengths and challenges of every student, she developed more effective ways to support their progress.

New Teacher Center regards that same "learning mindset" as fundamental to its work with school leaders, mentors and coaches, and beginning teachers. For example, mentors may observe that teachers avoid classroom routines in which they feel less confident. As together they learn more about how the brain develops, they start to appreciate the value of mistakes and even failure.

The outcome looks the same for adults and young people alike. If they come to value perseverance even more than perfection, their satisfaction and productivity increase—and so does the quality of their work and the intellectual vibrancy of their community.



READY TO SEE WHAT NEW TEACHER CENTER CAN DO FOR YOUR STUDENTS? GET IN TOUCH.

CONTACT US AT 831.600.2200 OR PARTNERSHIPS@NEWTEACHERCENTER.ORG