



Q&A: Supporting Educators—Insights from Greater Good Science Center

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Recently, we had a chance to sit down with two team members from the [Greater Good Science Center \(GGSC\)](#) to chat about their work, how it relates to social and emotional learning (SEL), and how it's supported by the resources that are part of [LG's Life's Good: Experience Happiness initiative](#). GGSC is based at UC Berkeley and studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being. Vicki Zakrzewski is their education director; Amy Eva is the associate education director.

Q: Amy, I understand you recently finished facilitating GGSC's Summer Institute for Educators, which focused on adult SEL and well-being. Could you tell us why this is a topic worth focusing on?

Amy: Educators recognize that if they're not well, their students aren't well. There's a lot of research showing that teacher burnout and student stress levels are correlated.

Educators also want support with stress and burnout, especially in the current environment, with mass shootings, ICE raids, and children separated from their parents. They're asking, "How do we stay healthy as adults so we can be there for our students? For some students, the only safe space is with us."

Q: How did you tailor the Summer Institute to answer these needs?

Amy: We spent a lot of time on mindfulness, self-compassion, and managing emotions. We looked at the challenge of "empathic distress," and how to take on the struggles of those around us without getting caught up in our own stress.

Q: Outside of the Summer Institutes, how is GGSC supporting educators?

Amy: We turn research into practical advice and activities for teachers and workplace professionals through articles, quizzes, videos, podcasts, and online courses. For example, in a recent [article](#) for Greater Good Magazine, I offered five tips to help teachers reignite their passion for teaching, from celebrating a favorite teacher or mentor to developing a resilience plan. Another [article](#) summarized advice for becoming more resilient.

Plus, we're working with multiple partners on a new website, Greater Good in Education, which will offer research-based strategies, lessons, and practices. For every practice, we'll include the

underlying research, discuss why it matters, and offer practical things teachers can try in their classroom, for their own well-being, and to cultivate positive classroom and school climates. The website will launch formally in January 2020.

The challenge is not to overburden teachers, and to help them to see this work isn't new—but we're seeing it through a new lens. We've talked about "whole child education" for years. Now we have new, evidence-based ways of doing it. Organizations such as CASEL and individuals such as Stephanie Jones at Harvard and her "SEL Kernels" project are making it much more accessible and easier to implement in the classroom.

Q: It seems like the curriculum GGSC helped LG develop as part of the *Experience Happiness* initiative can help take the burden off teachers in this kind of work. Vicki, can you tell us a bit about the high school curriculum in this initiative?

Vicki: It's a series of classroom activities, family activities, videos, lesson plans, professional development, and virtual field trips for middle and high school students focused on six happiness skills: mindfulness, human connection, gratitude, positive outlook, purpose and generosity. The turn-key materials provide engaging, hands-on activities that help students to identify actionable ways to bring happiness to their communities. The tools range from three-minute videos to 45-minute classroom lessons.

Just teaching this curriculum tells students that the teacher is prioritizing this work. I admire LG for doing this. There's such a dearth of curriculum for middle and high school students that goes beyond teaching life skills. The students are eager. Don't forget that happiness courses are the most popular offerings on college campuses such as Yale and Harvard.

Q: What was the GGSC's role in developing it?

Vicki: We reviewed the lessons primarily to ensure the activities were based on science and the pedagogy was sound. We helped them dig deeper, so that these introductory activities did not just cause a boost in positive emotions but led to something more—how to lead a meaningful life. That takes proactive work and lots of introspection.

Q: How does this work and the other efforts by GGSC connect to SEL?

Vicki: We think of it as "SEL-plus"...all the skills and behaviors identified by CASEL [link to wheel], plus we study topics such as gratitude, awe, forgiveness, compassion, self-compassion, and positive psychology.

Like SEL, happiness is a teachable skill. There are things you can do to cultivate it—the kinds of activities in the curriculum from LG's *Experience Happiness* initiative, but also deeper activities that teach mindfulness, discovering one's purpose, cultivating generosity, building relationships, and doing good by helping others, for example.

Q. What advice do you have for others who are helping adults develop their own SEL and related competencies?

Amy: You can't convince adults about the value of SEL by just telling them about it. You need to invite them to experience it. Create opportunities for adults to develop their own SEL competencies. Introduce them to tools for navigating intense emotions and strategies for rebooting their own nervous systems, If they feel the effects of these practices working in their bodies and minds, they'll be more likely to catch the fever.