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THE BLOG

## Who Is In Our Circle of Respect?

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**Arthur Camins**

Director

Center for Innovation in Engineering and Science Education  
Stevens Institute of Technology

WORK HABITS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	1ST PERIOD			2ND PERIOD			3RD PERIOD		
	MOST OF THE TIME	SOME OF THE TIME	BELOW	MOST OF THE TIME	SOME OF THE TIME	BELOW	MOST OF THE TIME	SOME OF THE TIME	BELOW
Works independently	✓			✓			✓		
Follows directions	✓			✓			✓		
Plans and completes his work on time	✓			✓			✓		
Accepts constructive criticism	✓			✓			✓		
Uses good judgment	✓			✓			✓		
Listens attentively	✓			✓			✓		
Puts forth best effort	✓			✓			✓		
Respects property	✓			✓			✓		
Is courteous in speech and action	✓			✓			✓		
Practices good health	✓			✓			✓		
Works and plays well with others	✓			✓			✓		

Many of the 2016 Republican presidential candidates and their supporters would not do so well on behavior section of my 1950s report card that included items, such as: Works and plays well with others; Listens Attentively; and Accepts Constructive Criticism. Scores ranged from seldom to always. Certainly, no one would be proud to claim a seldom on any of these commonly accepted positive character traits. However, the behavior and votes of too many of our fellow citizens suggest otherwise. We are at a historic inflection point. On the one hand, ascendant racism, misogyny, xenophobia, and anti-intellectualism harkens back to darker times. On the

other, addressing inequity is at the center of the current election cycle. We elected an African-American president twice and the Democratic candidates are a woman and a Democratic-Socialist Jew. These developments point towards a more progressive direction.

I continue to believe that schools that teach respect for others and for evidence can be a positive influence.

For parents, educators, and policy makers the pertinent questions are:

- How inclusive is the circle of “others” with whom students should have an opportunity to play, listen, and accept constructive criticism?

- What can schools do- at a time when inequity and bigotry appear to be growing- to widen and diversify students' circle of respect?
- What can schools do to teach students to listen to and consider multiple perspectives?
- What can schools do to teach students that it is not just acceptable but expected that their ideas should change when challenged by evidence and human values?

Education policies and practices can help in at least three ways: Promote structured social and emotional learning (SEL); Incentivize diverse, integrated classrooms, schools, and neighborhoods; Prioritize science and engineering instruction for all student that focuses on reasoning and arguing from evidence.

First, some good news: A growing number of schools provide opportunities to address these behavioral characteristics in structured social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. [SEL competencies](#) include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Research suggests that time spent on explicit attention to these talents pays off. A 2011 Meta-Analysis on the impact of SEL programs found that SEL programs improved academic performance while also reducing aggression and emotional distress among students, increased helping behaviors in school, and improved positive attitudes toward self and others (Durlak et al., 2011).

Second, some bad news: While the Supreme Court ruled in [1954](#) that the prevailing separate but equal charade of the time was unconstitutional, racial and socioeconomic inequality still prevails (Orfield, et al., 2012). School funding policies (Baker, et al., 2014; Biddle, et al., 2002), [housing](#) and zoning policies (Lens, et al., 2016), support for charter schools (Rotberg, 2014), and lack of political will all exacerbate this persistent status quo.

The research on the benefits of diversity is compelling in both education and the workplace.

Students who attend racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are more likely to achieve higher test scores, better grades and graduation rates, and establish cross-racial trust and friendships. Importantly, there is no evidence that integrated schooling harms any student group. In addition, there are long-term benefits for adults who help build civic capacity in communities. These outcomes are essential building blocks of social cohesion, a quality increasingly vital to a vigorous, just, multiethnic, democratic society (Mickelson, 2015).

Scott Page, a University of Michigan researcher on complex systems, makes a powerful case that “diversity matters not just because it is the right thing to

do. Diversity matters because it can increase [organizational effectiveness] by introducing more perspectives, heuristics, interpretations, and predictive models. These diverse cognitive tools can, in turn, improve an organization's ability to solve problems and make accurate predictions" (2007).

Collaboration is the means by which the benefits of diversity are realized in [work, life, and citizenship](#). Politically, we appear to be in an era of celebration of individual wealth accumulation and personalized learning. But, it is collaboration that is prized by employers and facilitates sound decision-making ability. A 2013 article in Forbes Magazine summed it up well, "Are you able to work effectively in a team? That's the skill employers most want when they are recruiting new college grads. The next most important skill: ability to make decisions and solve problems." A recent study by Zhang and colleagues (2015) showed that when students actively consider evidence and multiple perspectives about socio-scientific issues in collaborative groups they are better decision-makers than students who receive more teacher-directed instruction. The former were more likely to consider more sides of a dilemma, use more comprehensive reasoning, and better weigh the importance of reasons in a novel situation.

Third, some promising news: New developments in science education research and standards offer hope in each of the three report card domains. The Framework for K-12 Science Education (2012) and the Next Generation Science Standards (2013) represent a research and practitioner consensus about what is important for the science and engineering education for all students. These documents present a strong case that engaging students in and learning how to use the practices of scientists and engineers to build new knowledge and solve problems is essential for 21st-century workplaces and informed democratic participation as citizens. Importantly, these practices include evidence-based argumentation (Osborne, 2016). Simply put, this means that a proposed model of how the natural world works or an engineering solution to a problem should be defensible by evidence and subject to critique and revision in the larger community. In this view, the essential intellectual and social activities of understanding and improving the world in which we live are collaborative, community endeavors that are enriched and improved by consideration and evaluation of multiple perspectives. Significantly, these practices and dispositions can be learned and practiced.

We do not yet have substantial evidence that the combination of SEL, diverse integrated schools, and evidence-based argumentation in science classrooms will develop socially responsible adults who are less prone to act and vote on their biases. However, it offers hope, which is in short supply.

Besides, it would be terrific for that old report card and even better for humanity!

*Arthur H. Camins is the director of the Center for Innovation in Engineering and Science Education at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, N.J. He has taught and been an administrator in New York City, Massachusetts and Louisville, Kentucky. The ideas expressed in this article are his alone and do not represent Stevens Institute. His education policy writing is collected at <http://www.arthurcamins.com>. He tweets at <https://twitter.com/arthurcamins>.*

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