

Remembering Two Who Brought Us to SEL

MOST OF US enter the field of education with the intention of helping others, of making the world a better place. However, a few individuals so greatly exceed that benchmark that the rest of us can only stand in awe of their reach and their accomplishments.

We lost two such leaders in recent months: Eric Schaps and Roger Weissberg. While the world is made poorer by their untimely passing, it is also far richer for their contributions during lives of service. Perhaps you, as I, knew these men personally. Perhaps you only read about their work in professional journals. Or perhaps, even now, you do not recognize their names. Still, I venture their work has made your world a better place, thus deserving this tribute to their lives.

Schaps was the founder (in 1981) and president of the Developmental Studies Center (now the Center for the Collaborative Classroom). Weissberg was a distinguished professor at the University of Illinois Chicago and founder (in 1994) of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, or CASEL. Tackling similar issues through different organizations, they provided the foundational research, program development and organizational leadership that launched social-emotional learning into a national movement.

Classroom Integration

Deeply interested in prevention science, Schaps set out to help children develop academically, socially, emotionally and ethically in safe classroom communities. In developing the first comprehensive, systemwide approach to social-emotional learning known as the Child Development Program, he documented the gains children make when schools address academics hand-in-hand with social-emotional skills.

Schaps' groundbreaking research and program implementation then went a step further, pointing to the vital importance of developing those skills within caring classroom and school environments. He recognized that social-emotional learning cannot be siloed into small segments of skills and time but needs to be fundamentally integrated into classroom culture and academic instruction.

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To establish the value of this approach, he pioneered an integrated literacy and social development curriculum, demonstrating that purposefully designed curricula can achieve mutually beneficial social and academic goals. Coupled with his creation of innovative social development and prevention programs, Schaps provided the foundation for school-based mental health, social-emotional and character education programs across the country.

Shared Evidence

Many credit Weissberg's work and collaborative style with elevating social-emotional learning into the educational mainstream. He assembled researchers, practitioners and foundation leaders to launch CASEL, with the goal of establishing evidence-based SEL as essential to education. He brought leading researchers together to illuminate the evidence of SEL's impact in the

classic 1997 book *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* and then again to prepare the first meta-analysis of the research in 2011, driving home the power of SEL.

The concept of collaboration became deeply embedded as CASEL gathered state and district leaders in communities of practice. Ever a researcher and thinker who cherished others' perspectives, Weissberg was ready with more questions than answers as he pursued consensus around both the science behind SEL and the ideas for moving the field forward.

With hundreds of publications to their credit, their combined legacy rests in the strong evidence base they created and documented of the integral intertwining of young people's academic, social and emotional development. As advocates of equity, they moved the field from intervention aimed at only those students displaying at-risk behavior to prevention that benefits all students through caring relationships and a sense of belonging and community in classroom and school environments.

Eric Schaps and Roger Weissberg were pioneers and pathfinders, thought leaders and policy advocates. They provided the scientific underpinnings, programmatic designs and policy supports that affirm the importance of social-emotional learning in youth development and the vital role that schools play in fostering that development equitably in every student. Today, we can honor these leaders' legacy by recognizing both our privilege and our obligation to carry on and advance their extraordinary life's work.

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