

Soft Skills, Nay I Say “SUCCESS Skills”

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I don't know if you have ever stepped back and considered the simple questions of “What is the purpose of public education?” Throughout the years, there have been several generally accepted answers for that question ranging from the purpose is to help people hone their thinking skills, to helping people learn a pile of facts, to helping to produce citizens that will contribute to the general advancement of society. Personally, I prescribe to the notion that the purpose of education is to set people up for success in their future life so as to contribute to society. Obviously, the ideas around the different sorts of intelligence and thinking are important, but in my mind's eye they are just building blocks toward the greater good of society and the American way of life. So, the million dollar question is HOW do we go about creating the environment where we are mindfully taking the journey to realize the goal of that purpose?

If you have followed any of my messages via these letters, the pod casts we do, my tweets or any of my public speeches, you will find the common theme of making the educational process PERSONAL and MEANINGFUL to each student. We are striving toward that reality through a variety of educational efforts that speak to the students' interests and aptitudes, and we are experiencing success with those efforts, but if we deconstruct the activities a bit, it is apparent we are focusing on developing and honing our students' abilities and skills to be productive members of society. We are doing this by focusing on the “success skills” (most people call these “soft skills”) that are needed to function in society and to live a fulfilling life.

In the Holcomb Schools, we engage our students in a whole slew of experiences in and out of the classroom. Yes, we diligently address the standards within the various academic disciplines, but probably even more importantly, underneath it all we are working to foster the “whole child.” This means regardless if the focus of the moment is a fieldtrip, a unit test, a sports competition, a music concert, or recess we are mindfully focusing on facilitating the development of the students' sense of responsibility, their thinking skills (critical and divergent), their orientation toward cooperation, their communication skills, their over-all attitude toward life and other people, their teamwork skills, and their problem solving abilities. All of this is essential as these are the attributes needed in order to prosper in society today and tomorrow.

Ours is a dynamic world. It is ever advancing and changing, and I don't see that slowing down any time soon. Think about it – I never would have thought just ten years ago that I

could sit at home here in Holcomb, Kansas, and have a hand-made pizza from Chicago delivered to my doorstep, but that is now a reality. Who would have ever thought...? Given all of this and how our society will continue to change, it is even more important for us to prepare our students to function in that reality. Focusing on developing the students' success skills while providing them a thorough academic experience will give our students the leg up they are going to need as they move on beyond our school system. Now, I have to find that number to use to order my original Chicago deep-dish pizza. I wonder where I put it. J