

CHARACTER EDUCATION DEMYSTIFIED

THE CHESAPEAKE BAY OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL HOLISTIC
SOLUTION TO TEACHING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS
IN THE CLASSROOM AND IN THE WILDERNESS.

BY SARA GIBB



CHESAPEAKE BAY
OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL



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Teaching adolescents to become learners requires more than improving test scores; it means transforming classrooms into places alive with ideas that engage students' natural curiosity and desire to learn in preparation for college, career, and meaningful adult lives. This requires schools to build not only students' skills and knowledge but also their sense of what is possible for themselves, as they develop the strategies, behaviors, and attitudes that allow them to bring their aspirations to fruition. (Farrington, 2012)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The paper will showcase the Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School (CBOBS) wraparound Wilderness Expedition experience as a solution for teaching Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills to youth, specifically in the areas of social problem solving, resilience, emotional self-efficacy, and conflict management. Intentionally developing Social and Emotional Learning skills leads to increased mastery in personal, interpersonal, and academic achievement.

Multiple factors in the life of the current American school child can lead to a stressed emotional state that negatively affects school performance and social facility. Poverty, media influence, peer pressure, academic stress, and more combine to create potentially toxic environments for our youth.

Increasingly, American students are coming to school and life with significant emotional burdens. An estimated 12-30% of all school-aged children have emotional disorders damaging enough that eventually these children will suffer severe educational problems (Becker, 2012).

If we step back and consider the research literature, what are the non-cognitive factors that most strongly influence academic behaviors? Students who are equipped with effective learning strategies and possess academic mindsets of belonging, relevance, self-efficacy, and the valuing of effort are most likely to exhibit positive behaviors and the academic perseverance to succeed in their courses. Classrooms that build these strategies and support these mindsets are characterized by clear goals and high expectations for student success, the teaching and practice of strategies that help students become effective learners, significant levels of teacher monitoring and support, multiple opportunities for students to achieve success, and an absence of fear of failure. (Hoskins, 2016)

Regardless of the causes, school-based professionals are bearing the brunt of the responsibility of focusing their efforts not only on academic instruction, but also on teaching Social and Emotional Learning skills as well. Charged with teaching these skills, teachers and administrators are seeking ways to go beyond just encouraging a growth mind-set. Carol Dweck said, “My work ... is focused on attitudes, beliefs, that help kids learn. Social and Emotional Learning is bigger than that” (Dweck, 2016).

As ‘big’ as Social and Emotional Learning skills are in theory, we at CBOBS have demystified the concepts, broken down constructs, and are teaching Social and Emotional Learning skills to students to help them develop themselves into successful students and individuals.

Our custom-created school-based SEL-focused academic curriculum, coupled with our 5-day classic outdoor Wilderness Expedition, is producing noteworthy outcomes. Our academic and environmental approaches to whole-student instruction are supported by findings from “a recent meta-analysis of school-based interventions for enhancing social and emotional learning in students” that focuses on “developing adolescents as learners, ... paying attention to ... mindsets, skills, strategies, and behaviors” (Farrington, 2012).

Guided by Outward Bound’s field- and time-tested Process Model (Appendix A), we subscribe to the theory that, “Social and Emotional Learning is not a stand-alone initiative, but rather is aligned ... with other district initiatives and priorities, including curriculum and instruction” (Osher, 2014). We utilize our cooperative instructional coaching model with our classroom-based education partners to continuously build common ground (Hoskins, 2016). Our wrap-around academic/Wilderness Expeditions demonstrate findings that are similar to other successful Social and Emotional Learning programs (Durlak, 2011).

We challenge administrators and group decision makers in the Chesapeake region and beyond to consider what their students are capable of accomplishing, and take the first steps to work with us to design a program that will improve student outcomes, both within your school community and in your community at large.

CHALLENGE

How do we teach character to modern school students?

How do we break down the component parts of character education into teachable skills that our novice students can practice, and eventually master? Many of the component parts of character education are similar to the skills that combine to encompass the area of 'Social and Emotional Learning'. "The focus of Social and Emotional Learning is distinct and centers on 'the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors'" (Hamedani, 2015).

Our challenge is to isolate the teachable skills that are critical to developing well-rounded citizens, teach them, allow the space for students to practice them in both safe and challenging circumstances, and ensure that students can transfer these skills out of the school building, out of the wilderness, and into their families and communities.

In addition to being required in current state (Hamedani, 2015) and federal legislation (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015), we at CBOBS believe these skills to be critical to all people's happiness.

Compared to controls, Social and Emotional Learning participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement. (Durlak, 2011)



We not only facilitate learning experiences for our participants, but also for their teachers through our in-school Character Curriculum®. A national survey found that "Seventy-five percent of teachers believe that supporting students' social and emotional needs will improve student success in school" (Hamedani, 2015).

Leveraging the benefits of social emotional learning has been found to mitigate gaps in opportunity and achievement for low-income students and for students of color. (Hamedani, 2015)

To meet this challenge, we have forged a solution 30 years in the making, and are obtaining remarkable results with our teachers and students alike.

SOLUTION

The Outward Bound Mission is to change lives through challenge and discovery. We use and teach experiential education techniques in supportive, appropriately-risky, challenging natural environments. Through our in-school Character Curriculum® and Wilderness Expeditions, we facilitate scenarios where our students are able to discover that they are capable of more than they ever thought possible.

...Over 90% of respondents supported the need for character education in America's PreK-12 schools and that less than 25% of them believed that it was emphasized enough within their programs ... 66% of the Deans favored making it a requirement for state certification. More than 80% reported that they wanted to learn about best practices; 68% wanted to see samples of course syllabi; and more than 66% wanted to learn about related books and resources. (Cohen, 2006)



We combine our extensive school-based curriculum with a 5-day wilderness or urban expeditionary course to teach Social and Emotional Learning and character skills and intentionally allow students to practice them.

Our Character Curriculum® is a 5-session, classroom-based set of activities that helps teachers and youth leaders explore five essential questions with their students:

Before Expedition:

- What is leadership?
- Why do some people overcome challenge and others give up easily?
- What is effective communication?

After Expedition:

- How do our experiences shape and define us?
- What brings about change?

Each session includes field-tested, concrete lessons and activities, as well as options for more abstract, thought-provoking extension activities for more intellectually developed students.

School districts are increasingly recognizing the value of addressing Social and Emotional Learning as an essential part of education for all students. School-based Social and Emotional Learning programs (1) enhance students' social and emotional skills and classroom behavior; (2) improve attachment and attitudes toward school; (3) decrease rates of violence and aggression, disciplinary referrals, and substance use; and (4) improve academic performance. (Osher, 2014)

In schools and on Expedition we create small crews of students to maximize the effectiveness of their learning (Hamedani, 2015). Our Instructional Designer works with school-based professionals to design the course of study most appropriate for each individual partner school's or organization's goals. In addition, schools receive professional coaching support to teach them the facilitation skills they need to best deliver the Character Curriculum® for their students. After the expedition, school-based staff debrief the experience to encourage the students' skill transfer back into their communities.

Our CBOBS solution specifically teaches Social and Emotional Learning skills for both students AND the professional school-based staff with whom we work. We focus on specific Social and Emotional Learning skills both in our classroom curriculum as well as through the curriculum of each individually designed Expedition. Participant outcomes within these constructs listed below are assessed using a survey tool created in conjunction with Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, and our data show consistently positive gains (Appendix B).

Our skill areas of focus are:

- Social problem solving
- Resilience
- Emotional self-efficacy
- Conflict management

SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Throughout the Character Curriculum© and Wilderness Expedition, students are placed into situations where they need to rely upon their own wits, their communication skills, and their ability to work as a team to successfully move through a scaffolded series of engaging experiences in a cooperative, productive fashion. By intentionally creating dissonance in the relatively safe learning environments of school and in the wilderness, we are enabling our students to develop the skills they need to succeed in their relationships in the far riskier environments of life they will encounter (Cohen, 2006).



Elias et al. (1997) defined Social and Emotional Learning as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively. The proximal goals of Social and Emotional Learning programs are to foster the development of five inter-related sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. (CASocial and Emotional Learning, 2005 from Durlak, 2011)

During the expedition, extensively trained Outward Bound Instructors engage students by utilizing Outward Bound's Design Principles: Learning Through Experience, Challenge and Adventure in Supportive Environments. Consistent with Farrington 2012, our goal is not only to create cohesive teams, but also to teach crewmembers how to learn to self-regulate and continue on their own social problem-solving learning arcs long after they leave the wilderness.

SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING

The American Psychological Association (2014) defines resilience as, “The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress” (Southwick, 2014). As an Outward Bound school primarily serving an urban population, we at CBOBS craft our school and wilderness curricula with a specific eye toward eliciting resiliency skills development. Creating an environment where students are able to internalize the idea “that they, and not their circumstances” are responsible for their actions and resulting consequences (Konnikova, 2016) is a central idea to teaching resilience as a skill on an Outward Bound Course.

We operate in small crews of 10-12 students to enable the creation of supportive relationships that are critical to developing resilience in children (Becker, 2012 and Southwick, 2014). Ideally the school-based professional implementing our Character Curriculum© also serves as a chaperone on the Wilderness Expedition, and returns to his or her school or organization with the crew to transfer the learned skills back into their social/academic environment. Levels of resilience can change over time (Konnikova, 2016), a notion we at Outward Bound have been familiar with for decades.



EMOTIONAL SELF-EFFICACY

An Outward Bound Wilderness Expedition provides an incredibly intense, personal experience. Though our modern world of electronic connectivity would try to convince us otherwise, we are more disconnected than ever, particularly our youth. It is part of the Outward Bound mission to positively change the lives of our students by challenging them to discover both who they are, and also to open their aperture to see that there is also more to others than they might at first glance assume. To navigate these tricky waters and expand our students' learning in this area, we rely heavily on the teaching of self-regulation to enable effective collaboration in our groups (Cohen, 2006).

Learning strategies have important relationships with other non-cognitive factors. Utilizing appropriate learning strategies can make students' academic behaviors more productive and effective, contributing to improved academic performance. As a result, learning strategies tend to increase students' self-efficacy (the 'I can succeed at this' mindset), which in turn is related to increased academic perseverance when schoolwork gets challenging. (Farrington, 2012)

Self-regulation is not only a valuable skill, but also a strong predictor of student performance in both academic and social realms (Farrington, 2012, Hoskins, 2016, and Durlak, 2011). In fact, schools that deliberately teach Social and Emotional Learning skills, institution wide, show dramatic advances over schools that do not (Hamedani, 2015) as shown in the table below.

How often do these things apply to you? (% often)	Social and Emotional Learning Schools N = 362	Comparison Schools N = 1910	χ^2
When I sit down to learn something really hard, I can learn it.	79.3	57.0	55.81***
If I decide not to get any bad grades, I can really do it.	84.4	66.2	43.94***
If I want to learn something well, I can.	88.8	67.9	60.11***
When studying, I try to work as hard as possible.	73.7	59.8	23.23***
When studying, I put forth my best effort.	69.1	60.2	9.72**
When studying, I keep working even if the material is difficult.	71.2	53.9	35.11***
When studying, I try to do my best to acquire the knowledge and skills taught.	80.7	61.6	45.05***
How much do you agree with the following... (% agree)	Social and Emotional Learning Schools N = 362	Comparison Schools N = 1910	χ^2
When I work hard, teachers praise my effort.	88.7	65.8	74.98***

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the Social and Emotional Learning schools sample across items was 97%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the greatest number of valid responses per sample across items. Response categories: % often, % sometimes, % never; % agree, % disagree.

Sources: Social and Emotional Learning schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors' calculations.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

We develop conflict management skills, and enable students to practice these skills in pursuit of proficiency. In order to enable a healthy exchange of ideas both inside and out of school, students must learn how to peaceably disagree. Feeling a sense of belonging to their group, understanding how to best communicate with one another, and learning positive social behaviors are all essential ingredients in honing a group's conflict management skills (Hoskins, 2016, Becker, 2012, and Durlak, 2011).

Also critical in this calculus is to practice what we've learned about facilitation techniques with our school and group partners so that teachers, administrators, and group leaders can model for students what our highly trained Instructors do out in the wilderness (Ferreira, 2012). Being able to helpfully facilitate conflict, or 'storming', is critical for school/student group-based professionals to be able to broaden the progress their participants made while on expedition.

Students who are more self-aware and confident about their learning capacities try harder and persist in the face of challenges ... Students who set high academic goals, have self-discipline, motivate themselves, manage their stress, and organize their approach to work learn more and get better grades ... students who use problem-solving skills to overcome obstacles and make responsible decisions about studying and completing homework do better academically. (Durlak, 2011)



New research suggests that Social and Emotional Learning programs may affect central executive cognitive functions ... researchers have highlighted how interpersonal, instructional, and environmental supports produce better school performance through the following means: (a) peer and adult norms that convey high expectations and support for academic success; (b) caring teacher student relationships that foster commitment and bonding to school; (c) engaging teaching approaches such as proactive classroom management and cooperative learning; and (d) safe and orderly environments that encourage and reinforce positive classroom behavior. (Durlak, 2011)

CONCLUSION

How do we teach character to modern school students?

CBOBS has a field-tested, data-driven answer. By engaging your students in our Character Curriculum© and Wilderness or Urban Expeditions, we can work together to teach the skills that scholars and citizens of character exhibit. When you stop thinking about what a leader is, and start thinking about what a leader can do – and want your students to exhibit the same behaviors - you are ready to talk to us about skill building with your students. Cohen tells us that “social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions provide an essential foundation for life-long learners who are able to love and work” (2006), and we couldn’t agree more!

When approached comprehensively, Social and Emotional Learning is successful in teaching youth the necessary life skills to realize true accomplishment (Hoskins, 2016, Durlak, 2011, Ferreira, 2012, Hamedani, 2015, Osher 2014, Farrington, 2012).



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APPENDIX A



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THE OUTWARD BOUND PROCESS MODEL (WALSH & GOLINS, 1976)

The most cited theoretical outdoor education model is the "Outward Bound Process Model", sometimes referred to as the "Walsh and Golins Model" (Walsh & Golins, 1976). This model proposes a series of seven processes to explain the apparent power and effects of Outward Bound programs:

- A motivated and ready learner who is placed into →
- prescribed physical and social environments, then given a →
- characteristic set of problem-solving tasks which creates a state of →
- adaptive dissonance leading to →
- mastery or competence which in turn leads to →
- reorganization of the meaning and direction of the experience. In this way, the learner continues to be →
- oriented toward living and learning.

Finally, the OBPM suggests that the learner will then continue to be positively oriented to further learning and development experiences (transfer).



FIGURE 1. OUTWARD BOUND PROCESS MODEL (FROM PRIEST & GASS, 1997, P. 140)

APPENDIX B



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REPORT CARD

peer leadership expedition



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CHESAPEAKE BAY OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL

Dear School Name Private,

During the spring season, students from your school participated in a Peer Leadership Expedition on the Appalachian Trail with the Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School (CBOBS).

Together with their crew, students faced the rigors and responsibilities of expeditionary travel. They navigated the trail and the stages of group development. They prepared meals for their crew while their own stomach growled. They helped create and maintain a positive culture in spite of sore feet and homesickness. Crew-cohesion inspired these students to discover new depths of resolve and ability; we hope they never settle for less and are pleased to share with you the outcomes of this program.

A longitudinal study created by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health determined that Peer Leadership Expeditions improve adolescents' social and emotional skill development.

Your students participated in this study by completing a 19 question survey; once before their Peer Leadership Expedition and once after. The survey assesses expedition outcomes by measuring change in each student's socio-emotional skill set, specifically: conflict management, emotional self-efficacy, grit/resilience, and problem solving.

SKILL	RELEVANCE TO YOUR STUDENTS	EXAMPLE
Conflict Management	Enhancing abilities to manage conflict non-violently via effective communication and conflict resolution and to understand the importance of constructive conflict management are a necessary component of reducing youth violence.	"Most arguments can be solved by talking it out."
Emotional Self-Efficacy	The ability to manage emotions in a constructive manner helps young people react to stress and challenge in healthy, non-violent ways.	"When somebody makes me angry, I give them a chance to explain things."
Grit / Resilience	Maintaining intentions and persisting in the face of challenge is a key non-cognitive skill associated with the success of youth who grow up in adverse conditions.	"My belief in myself gets me through hard times."
Problem Solving	Having confidence in his or her ability to address problems and utilize problem solving strategies enhances the likelihood an adolescent will be able to successfully navigate social and academic challenges.	"I am able to solve new and difficult problems."

As you consider your Expedition Report Card, if you'd like to talk about how to amplify these positive gains through your continued use of the Character Curriculum, please contact us to discuss your next steps.

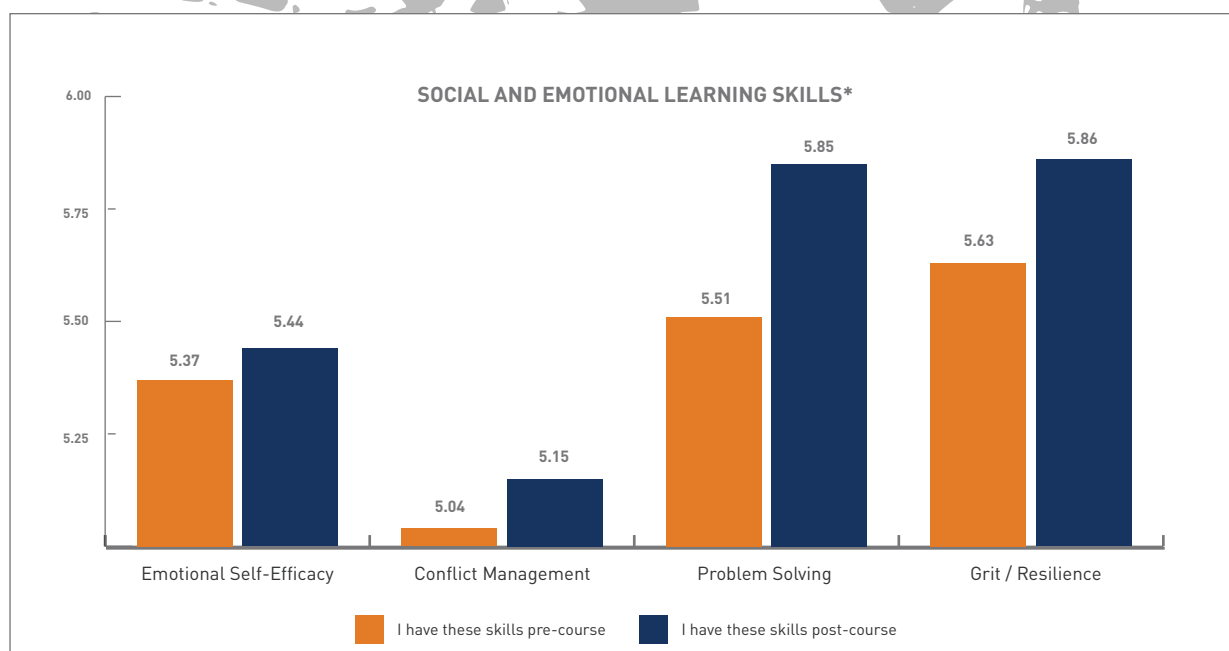
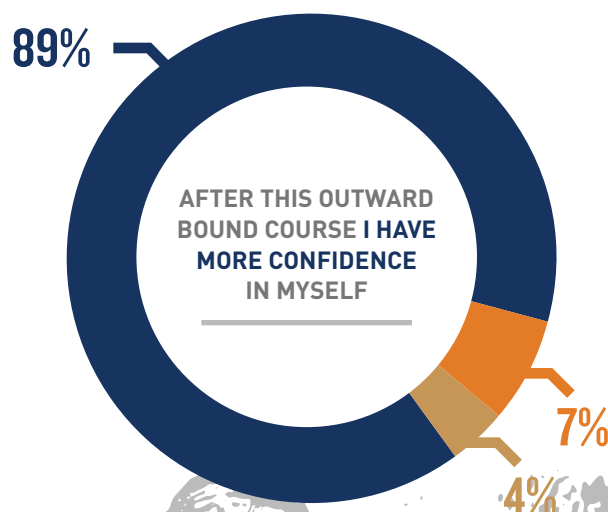
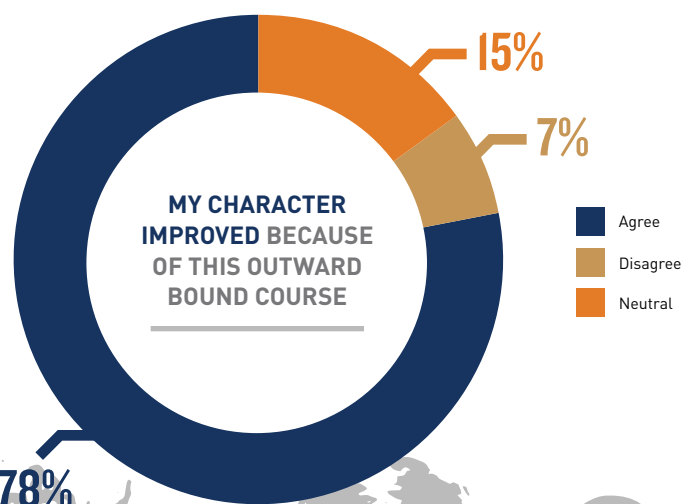
See you next year,

Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School

PEER LEADERSHIP EXPEDITION REPORT CARD

School Name Private | Spring

“ I learned to help the fellows around me, who’ll really be there for you, and to never give up!”



* Totals reflect the average scores of all students responses on a 7-point scale





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While resources ... are certainly critical ingredients for students' opportunity to succeed in school, they do not complete the recipe. Students also require psychological resources, such as the belief that achievement is possible for 'someone like me', the skills to persist in the face of challenge and failure, the understanding that learning is a process of growth and change, the chance to be motivated, engaged, and supported by their schools and the learning process, and the benefit of supportive relationships, belonging, and community. These resources are not add-ons—experiences that are positive for students to have but that are not necessary for the bottom line: academic performance. They are required for student success and achievement. (Hamedani, 2015)



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