

**Sheri Deneef**

ANY veteran educator will tell you that before learning reading, writing and other academic subjects, students must have key social skills in place.

Quickly in my teaching career, I came to the realization that teaching is not as simple as helping students to read, write and do math. There is so much more to it and what makes it complicated is that there are many hats that an educator needs to put on in order to make the classroom run smoothly. I have often thought about the dynamics at play and when you think about it, it makes sense that students don't just need to be able to learn, they need to be able to navigate their way through the day. Our classrooms are like small communities of diverse people with



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a day, five days a week. That is a significant portion of a child's day and life! Spending that much time with the same group of people can be wonderful. Strong, trusting relationships can grow as you really get to

different backgrounds, interests and personalities. This creates a complex environment that the individuals and the group must deal with for the entire school year. If you sit back and think about this, the children and teacher are together for at least six hours

know each other. But there is also opportunity for "bad days" and for issues to arise. Some days it feels like the teacher's primary job is to get students past their bad moods, the argument they had with a friend, or the disappointment of not getting what they wanted.

These are all part of the social skills needed to become life-long learners in a world that is constantly changing, and unfortunately they are skills that are not just inherited. They need to be explicitly modeled. Students need to learn how to resolve minor differences on their own and to gain confidence in their own abilities. This sureness then leads to a willingness to take risks, from raising a hand in class to trying something new. This is how learning best happens, no matter the subject.