

Lily Howard Scott - Supporting Students Wellbeing through Creativity Transcript

- Hello educators and welcome. My name is Lily Howard Scott. I am a Social and Emotional Learning Coach and Curriculum Developer though will always identify as a third grade teacher at heart. I'd like to thank you for taking time to join me virtually today to explore how tending to students social and emotional wellbeing in the classroom, which I'd argue is a deeply worthwhile pursuit on its own. Can also unlock and awaken their creativity, which as you all know well is really a young person's super power always longing to find space to breathe in the classroom, but sadly too often dampen by an outdated model of school that values compliance and conformity, you know by that I mean the ability to follow directions to have 25 children all show their learning in the exact same way, instead of valuing originality, variety, instead of fostering as a Sir Ken Robinson has written, spoken a lot about divergent thinking. In other words, the ability to imagine many solutions to a question nor a problem, instead of just one. And it's funny because we should all want our children to become citizens who are experts at divergent thinking so that they can imagine creative solutions to the problems of our day. But too often as Robinson puts it, kids are told there's one answer it's at the back. And so they grow up without the opportunity to practice divergent thinking which is an essential component of creativity. So back to our work together. What does unlocking kids' creativity you know fostering originality, divergent thinking, what does unlocking kids' creativity in the classroom have to do with their social and emotional wellbeing? Well, first let me define social and emotional wellbeing. By that I mean kids' ability to feel connected and secure in the classroom, to name and positively manage their emotions, to navigate failure with resilience, to operate with a growth mindset a growth mindset among myriad other skills. You know social and emotional wellbeing and creativity to me have a really symbiotic relationship. They go hand in hand because how you feel in the classroom is inextricably linked to how you do in the classroom, to whether or not you're able to take the creative risks that trigger meaningful learning. And while this might sound cozy or fluffy, it is rooted in neuroscience. And I'm referring to the work of Dr. Bruce Perry, author of the recent bestseller. "What Happened To You" with Oprah. Dr. Mary Helen Immordino Yang. I've included some resources in the accompanying handout for you to reference. Basically in order for kids to access their cortex, to take the creative risks that lead to the most exciting cognitive leaps, they first have to feel connected to the curriculum, to their peers, to their teachers. Ideally they'll feel uniquely known and valued. Essentially the umbrella idea here is kids need to feel secure enough, safe enough to be able to raise their hand and say something unexpected or unusual. You know something that might not be right but is their own original idea. And if kids don't have strategies with which they can manage their anxiety, you know if they're paralyzed by worry, about being shamed by their peers or a teacher, well then their stress response systems are busy. They're on very high alert just trying to feel okay in the classroom all day long. And it's harder for them to be comfortable enough to take those creative risks. So now that we're on the same page about

this link between social and emotional wellbeing and unlocking kids career creativity, what do we do about it? As an elementary school teacher, I always wanted professional development to feel practical tangible, something I could use straight away tomorrow. And so that's what I'm hoping to provide today. I'm going to introduce two strategies that you can adapt across age ranges and subject areas that will not only help kids connect with one another, you know foster that connectedness and positively navigate and manage their inner lives. So this is the social and emotional bucket if you will, but taboo, these strategies also, you know they unlock creativity within students as they offer plenty of choice and freedom. There's no right or wrong to engage with these exercises, they are the opposite of something prescriptive like a worksheet. They're open ended. They require kids to look within themselves, to choose what they'd like to bring forth, to contribute, which is an inherently creative act rather. And it's something that we often don't ask kids to do enough of school. So we're going to begin with Heart Mapping . Here you'll see an example, a few examples of Heart Maps. One from a young child, one from a middle grade student, another from an adult and a heart map developed by the great, great poet in Georgia poet and teacher. Her name is Georgia Heard supposed to become a friend of mine. The idea of a Heart Map is simple but powerful. It's a visual representation of all that you carry around with you in your heart. You know your most beloved objects, people that are important to you, places you love, your wonderings, hopes, memories associated with strong emotions, whether they're good or bad. Here you'll see some guiding questions and these are again from Georgia Head that might be useful to some children as they generate ideas. But it's important to note that children can respond to all of these questions or none of these questions. They can pour their heart out onto the paper in whatever way they like. They have real agency here and Heart Mapping it's a wonderful tool to help children generate meaningful ideas for writing across genres, personal narrative, nonfiction poetry, instead of kids, instead of telling kids what to write about through a prompt, write about your favorite animal and why. Your favorite color and why. Heart Mapping gives kids the power and reminds them that what they carry around with them all day long is worth investigating at school. There might be 20 or 25 seed ideas for stories in every Heart Map. Now there are many different ways that kids can create Heart Maps. Georgia recently published a wonderful book. You can see here called "Heart Maps" helping students create and craft, authentic writing. And there are just so many possibilities. She includes guiding questions and templates for a wonder about Heart Map, a gratitude Heart Map, concerns about the world Heart Map. Georgia and I actually recently collaborated on guiding questions for a pandemic Heart Map. You'll see an example here, you know to help kids name and process big feelings around the pandemic. And you know there can be a misconception about helping kids name and share emotions that are complex or difficult. There's an idea floating around that by naming that negative feeling you give it power. You sort of bring the kid down further but actually the inverse is true. When you can name an emotion, when it's no longer amorphous and curdling inside you, then you can manage it. You have the power. You know you can talk back to it. Name it, to tame it as so many have said. And when students share these incredibly creative truly one of a kind Heart Map I've never seen a Heart Map that was remotely like another Heart Map. They really are unique representations of kids in our lives. Something big

happens. They discover that what they think might alienate them from one another, their peculiar wonderings or idiosyncrasies or hopes or sadness don't alienate them at all usually. They actually connect them most deeply to one another. And this heightened sense of connectedness, belonging, confidence that Heart Mapping can trigger when students share up their maps with one another. In turn can trigger more risk taking in the classroom. More capacity for vulnerability, which like divergent thinking is another essential component of creativity. So a virtuous cycle of sorts is started. To me Heart Mapping it really embodies this sort of dreamy marriage if you will, between social emotional learning and creativity. And it triggers all sorts of beautiful things. Now, if Heart Mapping resonates with you, you might consider trying out another exercise that is rooted like Heart Mapping and social and emotional learning but also a wonderful creative outlet for kids. And here it is, it's called an outer shell and inner swirls identity map, which you'll see here. And I developed this concept five years ago as a third grade teacher, because while Heart Mapping was a wonderful way for my students to explore and share out their inner lives. My particular group of students, many of which had learning variations, they were especially eager to explore the tension between their inner and their outer identities. Many of the students in the class, they were aware of the assumptions their peers were making about them and they wanted to interrupt those assumptions. And so inspired by, but not limited to these guiding questions you see, the students completed these maps and then they use them to inspire introspective poetry. Here is the map of a child and a poem of a child. He'll remain nameless for now, but he's was a very popular kind gifted boy who everyone assumed had a pretty charmed go of it. It's interesting he writes on his outer shell here that he's nice and kind, that he likes to read and write, that he shares work a lot, which is my fault. I think I called on him too often in class but on the inside, it's really interesting he writes, he likes to disappear from the world into a book. He loves to dance, that he feels pressure. He gets frustrated. He writes most of the time. I'm very good at not nerd him. So my parents expect me not to sneak candy into bed. And when I do it, it's a bigger deal. And when other kids do it. He shares that he worries about death, that he scared of bugs. And you know when this child shared his map with the class and the accompanying poem about who he dares show both sides of himself to, something special happened. Kids who struggled more in the class, who had frustrated outbursts, were like hold the phone. Even he, even Mr. Perfect feels this way sometimes. Even he gets in trouble sometimes. You know I'm thinking of a couple kids in particular, they seem to really sort of embrace that, that essential truth I mentioned earlier which is that often it's what we think alienates us most from one another connects us. After this child shared his map, these particular students after they shared their connections with him, they moved the class through our classroom with just so much more confidence and peace because they'd gotten rid of that feeling that, oh, it's just me feeling. They felt so much more socially and emotionally regulated. You know they felt better at school so they could do better, make better choices navigate challenges with more resilience, throw themselves into their work with more creativity. I should add that both of those students, they really leaned into this particular assignment, took more creative risks with their outer shell and inner swirls maps after this child had shared his. Oh and I can't resist adding as a footnote here that the outer shell and inner swirls map, once the kids create them about

themselves, you can return to this template all year long and use these maps as children analyze characters, historical figures. I've seen fantastic Harry Potter outer shell and our swirls maps Our Ramona Quimby map, Alexander Hamilton map. It's a really great tool to help kids demonstrate their understanding about individuals or characters with a bit more freedom, a bit more creativity if you will than a paragraph or a worksheet can provide. So as you prepare for the 2022, 2023 school year, I hope that you will consider weaving Heart Mapping and perhaps outer shell and or swirl mapping into your curricula as a way to cultivate, not only social and emotional wellness but also to intern unlock kiddo's creativity. And I know that the last two and a half years of school in the age of COVID-19 have been deeply challenging because everything has been so topsy turvy. Everything's been turned on its head but I think we can take this opportunity to just throw out what wasn't working before March, 2020. You know this idea that our primary job as educators is to teach skills in a vacuum or get kids to comply. I mean of course there'll always be some of that but that doesn't need to be our focus anymore. We don't have to return to the old normal. I think there's an opportunity to return to a new normal to something better where social and emotional wellbeing, where opportunities to foster kids natural sense of creativity aren't simply sort of nice to have but are essential components of an engaging and effective education where kids actually paying attention and inspired in class growing. So you will find resources and templates on the accompanying handout. And I'm so looking forward to meeting some of you and to answering some questions. If you'd like to continue this conversation in any way, you can reach out to me at LilyHowardscott.com and be well I wish you all wonderful things as you gear up to support and learn alongside your very lucky students this year. Thank you.