



Creating
SOCIAL and
EMOTIONAL
LEARNING
Environments

Amy Cranston

Forewords by

Bryan Cranston & Michael Funk



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Dedication

For my family, friends, colleagues, and former students—you inspire me to be a better educator. For educators everywhere, both formal and informal, always be mindful—you are teaching much more than your subject matter; you are educating the whole child.

Foreword by Bryan Cranston

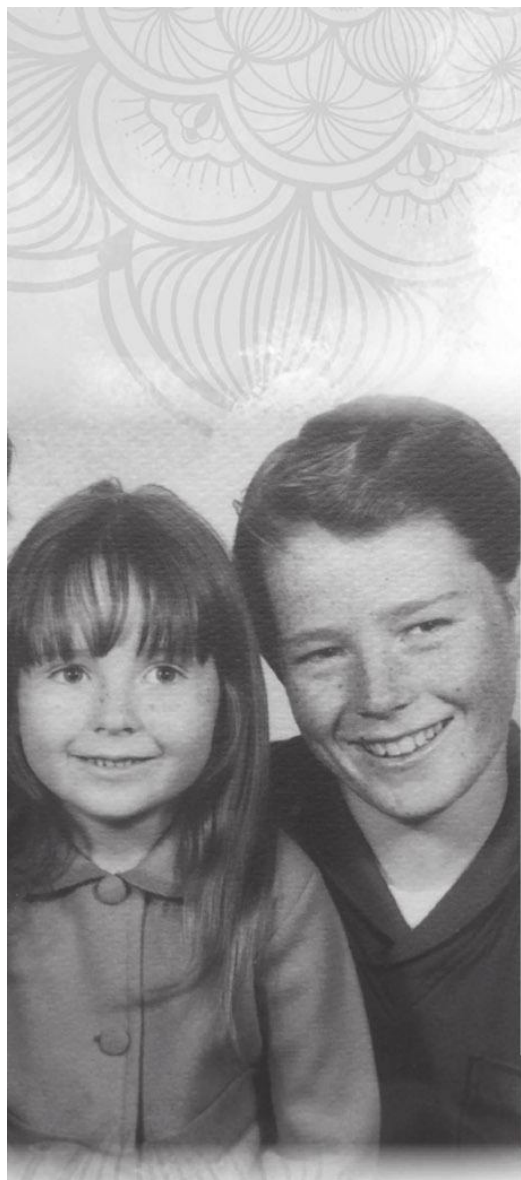
Foreword

As a young student, my grades were satisfactory, but my report cards often lamented such thoughts as *Bryan must start to focus more on his work*; *We need to see a more concentrated effort from him*; *Bryan just needs to try harder*; *Bryan needs to apply himself*; *Bryan is often goofing around and is disruptive*; *Bryan spends too much time daydreaming*. If I were a kid today, I'd probably be diagnosed with ADHD. But back then, the only diagnosis for my condition was that I wasn't doing a good enough job paying attention—as if I was purposefully disobeying my teachers. These comments, albeit coming from well-meaning teachers, tormented me like a bully, taking their toll on my social and emotional well-being, leaving me feeling inadequate as a student, and, to some extent, making me feel like I was stupid.



But then something changed and opened a whole new world for me. I've talked about this experience in my memoir, *A Life in Parts*.

I was very fortunate to have two wonderful mentors in Mrs. Waldo and Mrs. Crawford, my fifth and sixth grade teachers at Sunny Brae Elementary. Neither of them was finger-wagging or textbook. They wanted their students to find their own ways to express themselves, and they encouraged me to explore performance. I learned that there were other ways to do a book report besides sitting down and writing the tired old "*Huck Finn*, Mark Twain's most acclaimed work, tells the story of the travails of a young man as he leaves his hometown seeking adventure..." blah, blah, blah. None of that. I could act it.



Amy and Bryan Cranston

My teacher-mentors didn't believe in the "one size fits all" mentality toward teaching, and I was the beneficiary of their philosophy—not just during those two short years in elementary school but for my lifetime. That realization made me see just how critical social and emotional learning really is for children. This aspect of education becomes the foundation for a happy and productive life. Without those teachers showing me a different way to learn, I don't think I would be where I am now. Their emotional support instilled a level of confidence in me that I hadn't felt before—that I never knew existed. Was it always there, lying dormant, just waiting for the right teacher or the right opportunity to express it? Regardless, that confidence grew. I suddenly felt empowered because I recognized that I was able to experiment in my learning and to value the lessons I learned from both my successes and my failures. I embraced trial-and-error and, in the process, developed a stronger work ethic. All of this, I believe, can be traced back to two caring teachers who saw a rambunctious kid and didn't disregard him or label him as a disrupter but kept turning him in a direction where he might eventually find himself. And he did. And I am eternally grateful to those two heroes in my life.

As an actor, it is imperative that I possess the skills necessary to tap into my emotions and to inhabit the emotions of the character I'm portraying. Paramount to this is the ability to put myself in another's shoes—to feel compassion, empathy, fear, regret, guilt, joy—the full spectrum of human emotions. For those who have experienced a challenging childhood, myself included, accessing your emotions can be a difficult and painful experience. The ability, or lack thereof, to access and manage your emotions can mean the difference between a successful adult life and a disastrous one.

It was important to me to write this foreword for my sister's book—to support her, of course, but also to support the hundreds of thousands of kids who I will never have the chance to meet. My siblings and I did not have an easy childhood. We found our way through our passions—mine for acting, my older brother Kyle's for social activism, and my younger sister Amy's for education. What I have learned from my little sister's book (I mean, *Dr. Cranston's*book) is that the whole-child approach to education is now embraced as a legitimate and effective method of teaching and learning. Teachers everywhere understand the power of helping students find and nurture their passions.

Bravo! Bravo, to all of you educators out there. You who have one of the hardest and most important jobs and who hold the well-being of future generations in your hands. I stand in awe of the work you do every day to provide all children with a well-rounded education and, like Mrs. Waldo and Mrs. Crawford did for me, give your students the opportunity to explore and *discover their passions*.

—Bryan Cranston
Father, Husband, Actor, Proud Older Brother

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