Chapter 3
Socioemotional Learning in a Military School Environment

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ABSTRACT

Military boarding schools are in a unique position in the academic field because they create their own ecosystem in which cadets will learn and live. By integrating concepts of Maslow's hierarchy of needs into their practices, military boarding schools are creating educational learning spaces where cadets' needs are being met. Additionally, military boarding schools incorporate character traits such as the Army's seven core values. These values are taught in and out of the classroom and are essential to military boarding school life. Because military schools adopt these values, they also inadvertently adopt the values of social and emotional learning. Because these sets of values are used in tandem with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, students within the military boarding school environment have a higher probability of becoming both academically socially successful.

INTRODUCTION

Military boarding schools are a unique entity in the academic field. Due to the boarding nature and military structure they promote, military boarding schools create their own ecosystem in which students, called cadets, learn and live. Using this structure, integrating concepts of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs into their practices is intrinsic, creating educational learning spaces where cadets' fundamental needs are being met. For the purposes of this chapter, we have focused on the military boarding schools with which we have experience. These military boarding schools are associated with Army JROTC and therefore incorporate character traits such as the Army's Seven Core Values into their curriculum.

These values are present both in and out of the classroom and are essential to the operation of an Army-based military boarding school. By adopting these values, students also inadvertently adopt the

values of social and emotional learning. As these sets of values are used in tandem with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, students within the military boarding school environment have a higher probability of becoming both academically socially successful.

Through our work in these environments, we have observed the positive outcomes of student immersion in the corps. We have watched as students become leaders through a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world around them, and we have proudly witnessed them enter that world with the confidence and tools needed to succeed.

Socioemotional Learning

Socioemotional Learning (SEL) is a concept that has been integrated into education for decades. SEL instruction is especially important in a military boarding school environment. Unlike public schools that draw from similar social and economic backgrounds to create their student body, military schools are a mixture of students from around the world. This creates an environment where students are forced to interact with others from different regions, races, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. With such a diverse set of creeds, races, upbringings, and nationalities, each student must learn how to navigate these differences while crafting their own identity in regard to this new global community. This creates a delicate situation as military boarding schools must balance the goals of their military program while also being cognizant of the diverse needs of the population of the students they serve. By choosing to include SEL as a portion of the school's curriculum, school administration is taking on the task of understanding and addressing the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students in order to provide a model of education that seeks to influence the mind, body, and spirit. This inclusion of SEL in an intentional manner is integral to military boarding schools. Throughout this chapter we will be discussing the social, emotional, and academic benefits military boarding schools provide their students by implementing SEL within the context and application of the Army's Core Values and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

SEL focuses on the social and emotional competencies that allow individuals to manage emotions, accomplish set goals, experience and show empathy, create and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020). In an environment like a military boarding school, where each student's actions affect the entirety of the student body, referred to as the corps, giving students the basis to build these skills impacts not only the students as individuals but teaches the students that they are a part of a larger whole. SEL has five tenets which are self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

Self-awareness is described as being conscious of one's thoughts, feelings, values, and behavior, and is arguably the most important part of SEL. Teaching students how to be self-aware has major positive impacts on students and teachers not only during their time together within the school but for long after they have left. Focusing pedagogy on developing self-awareness helps students to understand why and when they will feel certain emotions and develop healthy ways of managing them. Additionally, having students learn about their thoughts and feelings can be beneficial to students that have identified behavior problems. This is even more important in a military boarding school environment which by law does not have to adhere to public school behavioral management plans. Teaching self-awareness to students also allows them to be honest with themselves as they begin to explore future educational opportunities and aspirations. At this developmental stage, understanding their emotions, behaviors, and ambitions helps students succeed in the school and in the community while also preparing them for their future

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