coordination that the other two groups fell into. They are clearly frustrated, frantically scanning the pieces on the table, seizing on likely possibilities and putting them near the partly finished squares, only to be disappointed by the lack of fit.

The tension breaks a bit when Rahman takes two of the pieces and puts them in front of his eyes like a mask; his partners giggle. This will prove to be a pivotal moment in the day's lesson.

Jo-An Vargo, the teacher, offers some encouragement: "Those of you who have finished can give one specific hint to those who are still working."

Dagan moseys over to the still-struggling group, points to two pieces that jut out from the square, and suggests, "You've got to move those two pieces around." Suddenly Rahman, his wide face furrowed in concentration, grasps the new gestalt, and the pieces quickly fall into place on the first puzzle, then the others. There's spontaneous applause as the last piece falls into place on the third group's final puzzle.

A POINT OF CONTENTION

But as the class goes on to mull over the object lessons in teamwork they've received, there is another, more intense interchange. Rahman, tall and with a shock of bushy black hair cut into a longish crew cut, and Tucker, the group's observer, are locked in contentious discussion over the rule that you can't gesture. Tucker, his blond hair neatly combed except for a cowlick, wears a baggy blue T-shirt emblazoned with the motto "Be Responsible," which somehow underscores his official role.

"You can *too* offer a piece—that's not gesturing," Tucker says to Rahman in an emphatic, argumentative tone.

"But that *is* gesturing," Rahman insists, vehement.

Vargo notices the heightened volume and increasingly aggressive staccato of the exchange, and gravitates to their table. This is a critical incident, a spontaneous exchange of heated feeling; it is in moments such as this that the lessons already learned will pay off, and new ones can be taught most profitably. And, as every good teacher knows, the lessons applied in such electric moments will last in students' memories.

"This isn't a criticism—you cooperated very well—but Tucker, try

to say what you mean in a tone of voice that doesn't sound so critical," Vargo coaches.

Tucker, his voice calmer now, says to Rahman, "You can just put a piece where you think it goes, give someone what you think they need, without gesturing. Just offering."

Rahman responds in an angry tone, "You could have just gone like this"—he scratches his head to illustrate an innocent movement—"and he'd say 'No gesturing!' "

There is clearly more to Rahman's ire than this dispute about what does or does not constitute a gesture. His eyes constantly go to the evaluation sheet Tucker has filled out, which—though it has not yet been mentioned—has actually provoked the tension between Tucker and Rahman. On the evaluation sheet Tucker has listed Rahman's name in the blank for "Who is disruptive?"

Vargo, noticing Rahman looking at the offending form, hazards a guess, saying to Tucker, "He's feeling that you used a negative word—*disruptive*—about him. What did you mean?"

"I didn't mean it was a *bad* kind of disruption," says Tucker, now conciliatory.

Rahman isn't buying it, but his voice is calmer, too: "That's a little farfetched, if you ask me."

Vargo emphasizes a positive way of seeing it. "Tucker is trying to say that what could be considered disruptive could also be part of lightening things up during a frustrating time."

"But," Rahman protests, now more matter-of-fact, *"disruptive is* like when we're all concentrating hard on something and if I went like this"—he makes a ridiculous, clowning expression, his eyes bulging, cheeks puffed out—"that would be disruptive."

Vargo tries more emotional coaching, telling Tucker, "In trying to help, you didn't mean he was disruptive in a bad way. But you send a different message in how you're talking about it. Rahman is needing you to hear and accept his feelings. Rahman was saying that having negative words like *disruptive feels* unfair. He doesn't like being called that."

Then, to Rahman, she adds, "I appreciate the way you're being assertive in talking with Tucker. You're not attacking. But it's not pleasant to have a label like *disruptive* put on you. When you put those pieces up to your eyes it seems like you were feeling frustrated and wanted to lighten things up. But Tucker called it disruptive because he didn't understand your intent. Is that right?"

Both boys nod assent as the other students finish clearing away the puzzles. This small classroom melodrama is reaching its finale. “Do you feel better?” Vargo asks. “Or is this still distressing?”

“Yeah, I feel okay,” says Rahman, his voice softer now that he feels heard and understood. Tucker nods, too, smiling. The boys, noticing that everyone else has already left for the next class, turn in unison and dash out together.

POSTMORTEM: A FIGHT THAT DID NOT BREAK OUT

As a new group starts to find their chairs, Vargo dissects what has just transpired. The heated exchange and its cooling-down draw on what the boys have been learning about conflict resolution. What typically escalates to conflict begins, as Vargo puts it, with “not communicating, making assumptions, and jumping to conclusions, sending a ‘hard’ message in ways that make it tough for people to hear what you’re saying.”

Students in Self Science learn that the point is not to avoid conflict completely, but to resolve disagreement and resentment before it spirals into an out-and-out fight. There are signs of these earlier lessons in how Tucker and Rahman handled the dispute. Both, for example, made some effort to express their point of view in a way that would not accelerate the conflict. This assertiveness (as distinct from aggression or passivity) is taught at Nueva from third grade on. It emphasizes expressing feelings forthrightly, but in a way that will not spiral into aggression. While at the beginning of their dispute neither boy was looking at the other, as it went on they began to show signs of “active listening,” facing each other, making eye contact, and sending the silent cues that let a speaker know that he is being heard.

By putting these tools into action, helped along by some coaching, “assertiveness” and “active listening” for these boys become more than just empty phrases on a quiz—they become ways of reacting the boys can draw on at those moments when they need them most urgently.

Mastery in the emotional domain is especially difficult because skills need to be acquired when people are usually least able to take in new information and learn new habits of response—when they are upset. Coaching in these moments helps. “Anyone, adult or fifth

grader, needs some help being a self-observer when they're so upset," Vargo points out. "Your heart is pounding, your hands are sweaty, you're jittery, and you're trying to listen clearly while keeping your own self-control to get through it without screaming, blaming, or clamming up in defensiveness."

For anyone familiar with the rough-and-tumble of fifth-grade boys, what may be most remarkable is that both Tucker and Rahman tried to assert their views without resorting to blaming, name-calling, or yelling. Neither let their feelings escalate to a contemptuous "f—— you!" or a fistfight, nor cut off the other by stalking out of the room. What could have been the seed of a full-fledged battle instead heightened the boys' mastery of the nuances of conflict resolution. How differently it all could have gone in other circumstances. Youngsters daily come to blows—and even worse—over less.

CONCERNS OF THE DAY

At the traditional circle that opens each class in Self Science, the numbers are not always so high as they were today. When they are low—the ones, twos, or threes that indicate feeling terrible—it opens the way for someone to ask, "Do you want to talk about why you feel that way?" And, if the student wants (no one is pressured to talk about things they don't want to), it allows the airing of whatever is so troubling—and the chance to consider creative options for handling it.

The troubles that emerge vary with the grade level. In the lower grades typical ones are teasing, feeling left out, fears. Around sixth grade a new set of concerns emerges—hurt feelings about not being asked on a date, or being left out; friends who are immature; the painful predicaments of the young ("Big kids are picking on me"; "My friends are smoking, and they're always trying to get me to try, too").

These are the topics of gripping import in a child's life, which are aired on the periphery of school—at lunch, on the bus to school, at a friend's house—if at all. More often than not, these are the troubles that children keep to themselves, obsessing about them alone at night, having no one to mull them over with. In Self Science they can become topics of the day.

Each of these discussions is potential grist for the explicit goal of Self Science, which is illuminating the child's sense of self and relationships with others. While the course has a lesson plan, it is

flexible so that when moments such as the conflict between Rahman and Tucker occur they can be capitalized on. The issues that students bring up provide the living examples to which students and teachers alike can apply the skills they are learning, such as the conflict-resolution methods that cooled down the heat between the two boys.

THE ABC'S OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

In use for close to twenty years, the Self Science curriculum stands as a model for the teaching of emotional intelligence. The lessons sometimes are surprisingly sophisticated; as Nueva's director, Karen Stone McCown, told me, "When we teach about anger, we help kids understand that it is almost always a secondary reaction and to look for what's underneath—are you hurt? jealous? Our kids learn that you always have choices about how you respond to emotion, and the more ways you know to respond to an emotion, the richer your life can be."

A list of the contents of Self Science is an almost point-for-point match with the ingredients of emotional intelligence—and with the core skills recommended as primary prevention for the range of pitfalls threatening children (see Appendix E for the full list).[2] The topics taught include self-awareness, in the sense of recognizing feelings and building a vocabulary for them, and seeing the links between thoughts, feelings, and reactions; knowing if thoughts or feelings are ruling a decision; seeing the consequences of alternative choices; and applying these insights to decisions about such issues as drugs, smoking, and sex. Self-awareness also takes the form of recognizing your strengths and weaknesses, and seeing yourself in a positive but realistic light (and so avoiding a common pitfall of the self-esteem movement).

Another emphasis is managing emotions: realizing what is behind a feeling (for example, the hurt that triggers anger), and learning ways to handle anxieties, anger, and sadness. Still another emphasis is on taking responsibility for decisions and actions, and following through on commitments.

A key social ability is empathy, understanding others' feelings and taking their perspective, and respecting differences in how people feel about things. Relationships are a major focus, including learning to be a good listener and question-asker; distinguishing between what someone says or does and your own reactions and judgments; being

assertive rather than angry or passive; and learning the arts of cooperation, conflict resolution, and negotiating compromise.

There are no grades given in Self Science; life itself is the final exam. But at the end of the eighth grade, as students are about to leave Nueva for high school, each is given a Socratic examination, an oral test in Self Science. One question from a recent final: "Describe an appropriate response to help a friend solve a conflict over someone pressuring them to try drugs, or over a friend who likes to tease." Or, "What are some healthy ways to deal with stress, anger, and fear?"

Were he alive today, Aristotle, so concerned with emotional skillfulness, might well approve.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY IN THE INNER CITY

Skeptics understandably will ask if a course like Self Science could work in a less privileged setting, or if it is only possible in a small private school like Nueva, where every child is, in some respect, gifted. In short, can emotional competence be taught where it may be most urgently needed, in the gritty chaos of an inner-city public school? One answer is to visit the Augusta Lewis Troup Middle School in New Haven, which is as far from the Nueva School socially and economically as it is geographically.

To be sure, the atmosphere at Troup has much of the same excitement about learning—the school is also known as the Troup Magnet Academy of Science and is one of two such schools in the district that are designed to draw fifth- to eighth-grade students from all over New Haven to an enriched science curriculum. Students there can ask questions about the physics of outer space through a satellite-dish hookup to astronauts in Houston or program their computers to play music. But despite these academic amenities, as in many cities, white flight to the New Haven suburbs and to private schools has left Troup's enrollment about 95 percent black and Hispanic.

Just a few short blocks from the Yale campus—and again a distant universe—Troup is in a decaying working-class neighborhood that, in the 1950s, had twenty thousand people employed in nearby factories, from Olin Brass Mills to Winchester Arms. Today that job base has shrunk to under three thousand, shrinking with it the economic horizons of the families who live there. New Haven, like so many other New England manufacturing cities, has sunk into a pit of

poverty, drugs, and violence.

It was in response to the urgencies of this urban nightmare that in the 1980s a group of Yale psychologists and educators designed the Social Competence Program, a set of courses that covers virtually the same terrain as the Nueva School's Self Science curriculum. But at Troup the connection to the topics is often more direct and raw. It is no mere academic exercise when, in the eighth-grade sex education class, students learn how personal decision-making can help them avoid diseases such as AIDS. New Haven has the highest proportion of women with AIDS in the United States; a number of the mothers who send their children to Troup have the disease—and so do some of the students there. Despite the enriched curriculum, students at Troup struggle with all the problems of the inner city; many children have home situations so chaotic, if not horrific, they just cannot manage to get to school some days.

As in all New Haven schools, the most prominent sign that greets a visitor is in the familiar form of a yellow diamond-shaped traffic sign, but reads "Drug-Free Zone." At the door is Mary Ellen Collins, the school's facilitator—an all-purpose ombudsman who sees to special problems as they surface, and whose role includes helping teachers with the demands of the social competence curriculum. If a teacher is unsure of how to teach a lesson, Collins will come to the class to show how.

"I taught in this school for twenty years," Collins says, greeting me. "Look at this neighborhood—I can't see only teaching academic skills anymore, with the problems these kids face just in living. Take the kids here who are struggling because they have AIDS themselves or it's in their homes—I'm not sure they'd say it during the discussion on AIDS, but once a kid knows a teacher will listen to an emotional problem, not just academic ones, the avenue is open to have that conversation."

On the third floor of the old brick school Joyce Andrews is leading her fifth graders through the social competence class they get three times a week. Andrews, like all the other fifth-grade teachers, went to a special summer course in how to teach it, but her exuberance suggests the topics in social competence come naturally to her.

Today's lesson is on identifying feelings; being able to name feelings, and so better distinguish between them, is a key emotional skill. Last night's assignment was to bring in pictures of a person's face from a magazine, name which emotion the face displays, and

explain how to tell the person has those feelings. After collecting the assignment, Andrews lists the feelings on the board—sadness, worry, excitement, happiness, and so on—and launches into a fast-paced repartee with the eighteen students who managed to get to school that day. Sitting in four-desk clusters, the students excitedly raise their hands high, straining to catch her eye so they can give their answer.

As she adds *frustrated* to the list on the board, Andrews asks, "How many people ever felt frustrated?" Every hand goes up.

"How do you feel when you're frustrated?"

The answers come in a cascade: "Tired." "Confused." "You can't think right." "Anxious."

As *aggravated* is added to the list, Joyce says, "I know that one—when does a teacher feel aggravated?"

"When everyone is talking," a girl offers, smiling.

Without missing a beat, Andrews passes out a mimeographed worksheet. In one column are faces of boys and girls, each displaying one of the six basic emotions—happy, sad, angry, surprised, afraid, disgusted—and a description of the facial muscle activity underlying each, for example:

Afraid:

• The mouth is open and drawn back.

• The eyes are open and the inner corners go up.

• The eyebrows are raised and drawn together.

• There are wrinkles in the middle of the forehead.[3]

While they read through the sheet, expressions of fear, anger, surprise, or disgust float over the faces of the kids in Andrews's class as they imitate the pictures and follow the facial-muscle recipes for each emotion. This lesson comes straight from Paul Ekman's research on facial expression; as such, it is taught in most every college introductory psychology course—and rarely, if ever, in grade school. This elementary lesson in connecting a name with a feeling, and the feeling with the facial expression that matches it, might seem so obvious that it need not be taught at all. Yet it may serve as an antidote to surprisingly common lapses in emotional literacy. Schoolyard bullies, remember, often strike out in anger because they misinterpret neutral messages and expressions as hostile, and girls

who develop eating disorders fail to distinguish anger from anxiety from hunger.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY IN DISGUISE

With the curriculum already besieged by a proliferation of new topics and agendas, some teachers who understandably feel overburdened resist taking extra time from the basics for yet another course. So an emerging strategy in emotional education is not to create a new class, but to blend lessons on feelings and relationships with other topics already taught. Emotional lessons can merge naturally into reading and writing, health, science, social studies, and other standard courses as well. While in the New Haven schools Life Skills is a separate topic in some grades, in other years the social development curriculum blends into courses such as reading or health. Some of the lessons are even taught as part of math class—notably basic study skills such as how to put aside distractions, motivate yourself to study, and manage your impulses so you can attend to learning.

Some programs in emotional and social skills take no curriculum or class time as a separate subject at all, but instead infiltrate their lessons into the very fabric of school life. One model for this approach —essentially, an invisible emotional and social competence course—is the Child Development Project, created by a team directed by psychologist Eric Schaps. The project, based in Oakland, California, is currently being tried in a handful of schools across the nation, most in neighborhoods that share many of the troubles of New Haven's decaying core.[4]

The project offers a prepackaged set of materials that fit into existing courses. Thus first graders in their reading class get a story, "Frog and Toad Are Friends," in which Frog, eager to play with his hibernating friend Toad, plays a trick on him to get him up early. The story is used as a platform for a class discussion about friendship, and issues such as how people feel when someone plays a trick on them. A succession of adventures brings up topics such as self-consciousness, being aware of a friend's needs, what it feels like to be teased, and sharing feelings with friends. A set curriculum plan offers increasingly sophisticated stories as children go through the elementary and middle-school grades, giving teachers entry points to discuss topics such as empathy, perspective-taking, and caring.

Another way emotional lessons are woven into the fabric of existing school life is through helping teachers rethink how to discipline students who misbehave. The assumption in the Child Development program is that such moments are ripe opportunities to teach children skills that are lacking—impulse control, explaining their feelings, resolving conflicts—and that there are better ways to discipline than coercion. A teacher seeing three first graders pushing to be the first in the lunchroom line might suggest that they each guess a number, and let the winner go first. The immediate lesson is that there are impartial, fair ways to settle such pint-size disputes, while the deeper teaching is that disputes can be negotiated. And since that is an approach those children can take with them to settle other similar disputes ("Me first!" is, after all, epidemic in lower grades—if not through much of life, in one form or another) it has a more positive message than the ubiquitous, authoritarian "Stop that!"

THE EMOTIONAL TIMETABLE

"My friends Alice and Lynn won't play with me."

That poignant grievance is from a third-grade girl at John Muir Elementary School in Seattle. The anonymous sender put it in the "mailbox" in her classroom—actually a specially painted cardboard box—where she and her classmates are encouraged to write in their complaints and problems so the whole class can talk about them and try to think of ways to deal with them. The discussion will not mention the names of those involved; instead the teacher points out that all children share such problems from time to time, and they all need to learn how to handle them. As they talk about how it feels to be left out, or what they might do to be included, they have the chance to try out new solutions to these quandaries—a corrective for the one-track thinking that sees conflict as the only route to solving disagreements.

The mailbox allows flexibility as to exactly which crises and issues will become the subject of the class, for a too-rigid agenda can be out of step with the fluid realities of childhood. As children change and grow the preoccupation of the hour changes accordingly. To be most effective, emotional lessons must be pegged to the development of the child, and repeated at different ages in ways that fit a child's changing understanding and challenges.