

Bonus #3 (The Pressure to Expedite Academic Growth)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to bonus episode number three of the September 21 bonus series for the *Empowered Principal* podcast.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Welcome my empowered leaders. Welcome to bonus episode number three. So we've talked about COVID not being over and us being very disappointed and sad about that. We've talked about morale being the priority for your staff and students this year. Today I'm going to address the pressure to expedite academic growth. I understand why you feel hesitant to put staff and student morale as your one priority. As good as it sounds to focus on processing the emotions of the pandemic, you've got to get students learning academically. I hear you.

The thoughts behind this urgency are things like they need to be ready for the next grade level. They need to be ready for graduation and for college. Not to mention that the district's putting pressure on you to put pressure on your teachers because they're getting pressure from the state and feds.

You want to know who gets squashed from all this pressure? Students. Our children. We are modeling to set aside their emotions and to think about nothing other than math, science, reading, writing, and all of the basic academic needs. We are crushing them under the adult pressures that we have created for them. There is nothing under them. Nowhere else for children to go. We are pressuring at an alarming rate our children to be successful, our children to perform and to output high quality work all of the

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time. We feel the pressure, they feel the pressure. They have no one else to pressure.

Do you see what's happening here? We are creating the emotional problems and the mental stress that children are facing. What's happening, the only outlet they have, is to act out. The behaviors are a product of what they are thinking and feeling. We, as the adults in their lives, are not addressing their thoughts and emotions. We are telling them those are soft skills. That we don't have time for that. They need to be religious, and they need to have grit.

No, we don't have grit. We're humans. We have grit about 50% of the time. We can be highly productive about 50% of the time, and the other time we're an emotional mess. Why are we expecting kids to be more resilient than us? I'm going to say the joke is on us. Students' ability to learn academic content comes from the ability to focus on their thoughts. Teaching is the evolution of the mind. The mind thinks thoughts. We're teaching children to think certain thoughts, to evolve their thinking. To expose them to new ideas and new ways of thinking, new skill sets. That's all thought.

If their brain is full of thoughts that have them triggered into chronic fight or flight mode, they cannot redirect their brain and bodies to academic learning. The same is true for our teachers. Teachers have been hustling and in 'figure it out no matter what' mode for so long, they haven't had time to recalibrate themselves mentally, physically, emotionally, psychologically.

Same is true with our kids. Our students out there. We are giving them no tools. We're telling them to forget and just look forward. Don't feel. Don't think about the past. Don't think about the last year and a half where you have been isolated or perhaps in a really scary unsafe situation. At best,

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even with the best parents in the best environments, kids have psychological repercussions. They've missed out on graduations and proms and dating and working and getting their driver's license and promotion ceremonies and birthday parties. It's all affecting us. It doesn't matter the age, gender, race, all of it.

What's happening is that we are trying to circumvent the human experience. Well, the human experience is about feeling. We have been given the gift of emotions. We need to allow ourselves time to talk about them and to process them and to acknowledge them and feel them.

Now we're saying it's been so long since kids have been in school and it's time to get back at it. What's happening is we're trying to go around the discomfort we've been feeling because we were in the pandemic at home, like in the shelter in place and in the remote learning. We didn't like the way that felt. So now we want to get out of that. We want to get back to school and just feel better, but that's not actually happening because the pandemic's not really done and there's all this unprocessed emotion and trauma that's occurred.

But we don't want to pay attention to it. We want to just pass it by and avoid it and get to the good feels again. Well, we're not going to get to the good feels until we understand how our brain's work, how emotions work. Because teachers, students, and school leaders are still in fight or flight mode.

So let me teach you something really quickly. This is called the model from the life coach school. I call it the STEAR cycle. It's the same tool, just a different acronym. It goes a little like this. The situation is the pandemic.

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Now, we have thoughts about the pandemic. A lot of thoughts. There's millions and millions of people out there with lots and lots of thoughts about the pandemic. In education, we're saying the pandemic has left us behind. We miss our friends. We could die. I'm not safe. This will never end. We're never getting that experience back again. It depends on are you a student? What grade level are you? Are you a teacher? We're all processing thoughts around the pandemic. Everybody's thoughts are a little bit different, but there are definitely some commonalities and some themes.

What happens is those thoughts trigger our emotions. A lot of us are feeling fear, panic, fatigue, uncertainty, doubt, grief, sadness, depression, frustration, despair, hopelessness, confusion, overwhelm. There's a lot of negative emotion surrounded by the pandemic and the nuances of the pandemic.

What's happening is when we feel unsafe and uncertain, when our brain feels that there's a threat to us whether it's physical, emotional, or psychological, we hunker down. We get into fight or flight mode. We fight or we flight, or we fawn, which means to placate, right. Or we freeze. We somehow hunker down in whatever our default mode is to try and protect us, to try and establish some certainty, to try to keep us safe, to try and create calm. So we are tethered in this storm, but the result of all of this is unprocessed emotions.

So I call this the STEAR cycle. S for situation. T for thoughts. E for emotions. A for the way we approach things. The actions we take and decisions that we make. Then R, the results.

So I was coaching one of my clients this week. We were talking about how to help teachers feel like it's okay to take more time to process with kids. To not jump into academics and to process in real time when kids have

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emotional needs, or they show exhibiting behaviors that require attention. Versus sending them out of the classroom. Like I don't have time to deal with this. I don't want to deal with this, or I don't know how to deal with this. Get this kid out of here. Somebody else deal with it because I've got to get to academics, right?

So this principal was trying to determine a plan and an approach with her teachers that let them know she really meant it's okay to take time to slow down your processes, slow down the teaching pacing guide kind of thing. To deal with students emotional and behavioral needs. So I put the context of our coaching into a STEAR cycle.

So the situation is students are having emotional and behavioral needs, big time. The teachers are thinking, "I don't know how to handle this emotion. I'm not sure what to do. I can't afford to take time to handle this. I have to focus on academics. Kids are already behind. I'm held accountable for test scores. I don't want to get into trouble. Academics is what I know how to do." So teachers are feeling fear and doubt and insecurity and frustration and worry, all the yucky feels, right.

So what they're doing, because they're believing all of those thoughts are true, like absolute truth. They're kicking students out. They're pushing the responsibility to others. They're focusing on academics in the classroom. They're not taking the time to address the emotional behavioral needs of students.

The result of that is that time isn't taken to address the needs. Teachers, therefore, because they're not slowing down and taking the time, they're not learning the skills needed to handle those behavioral and emotional needs. They stay focused on academics. The behaviors continue to need to be addressed. The support team, whoever is receiving these students,

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they get more and more taxed and fatigue because they're receiving more and more students.

When that's the approach, the students who are having issues are not out of class more often resulting in what? In higher academic needs. We are creating the result we're trying to avoid when we believe we can't take time to deal with the obstacle of emotional needs and behavioral needs.

So I asked my client what would teachers have to think in order to feel safe and comfortable with slowing down? With prioritizing emotional and behavioral needs. So we came up with a list. This is what your teachers are going to have to believe is true so that they feel safe and comfortable enough to slow down and take care of kids in an emotional and social and mental way.

I have support available. The team will come when I need them. I don't have to figure this out alone. We're all on the same team. It's okay not to know how. We're getting trained on this. I know where to go if I need help or have questions. My principal fully supports me. I have permission to take things slowly as they come up. I won't be fired or reprimanded for taking time to handle emotional and behavioral needs. It's safe for me to be on a learning curve and take time to learn.

The priority is handling emotional and behavioral needs. When I handle emotional and behavioral needs, academic needs can be better met. In fact, the academic needs will be better met and more quickly met when I first address emotional and behavioral needs. Academics happen faster when student's emotional needs are met.

Think of how your school would operate if teachers had this belief system about themselves, about you, and about students. If teachers believed all

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of those above statements, how would they be feeling and how would they approach the teaching day? How does slowing down and allowing for longer periods of time to learn all of the procedures again, the content, the social skills, and process the emotions that allow students to access that content more quickly.

When emotions have been processed, the brain is open and available to new ideas and learning. It can't do more hard things until it's processed the hard things it's already had to do during the pandemic. So I invite you to consider all of the ways in which not pressuring teachers to push harder will result in academic gains.

What if, just for a second play with me here. What if focusing on emotional wellness was the ticket to faster academic gains? That all of this pressure and pushing kids harder and pushing teachers harder was the very obstacle in your way? I mean look at it this way. We've been pushing harder and harder for the last 30 years, maybe longer. I don't know. I've been in education 30 years. From my experience and my observations, it hasn't seemed to be working yet for us. So maybe trying a new approach isn't so unreasonable after all.

If you can't imagine how this might be possible, how slowing down could make faster gains, I invite you to the empowered principal program. It is my exclusive one to one coaching program that is customized to your specific school leadership experience. We meet weekly so that you always have someone to process your week in real time and help you stay focused on what matters most to you.

Click on the link in the show notes to schedule a free consultation call with me. Can't wait to hear from you. I love you all. I hope these three episodes have been extremely helpful. Please reach out and get the support you

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need from the empowered principal program. I'll talk to you guys next week. Take care. Bye.

If this podcast resonates with you, you have to sign up for the Empowered Principal coaching program. It's my exclusive one to one coaching and mentorship program for school leaders who believe in possibility. This program is designed for principals who are hungry for the fastest transformation in the industry. If you want to create the best connections, impact, and legacy for yourself and your school, the Empowered Principal program was designed for you. Join me at angelakellycoaching.com/work-dash-with-me to learn more. I'd love to support you in becoming an empowered school leader.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.