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Book review

Emotional literacy at the heart of the school ethos

Author:

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Steve Killick is a clinical psychologist and it is out of his professional experience and time spent working at the Headlands School for special behavioural needs learners that this book was written. [As a psychologist working at that school] he was commissioned to prepare and produce a programme of training for the school staff, the main objective of which was to raise awareness of how important emotional intelligence and emotional literacy are in dealing with behaviourally difficult learners. The programme also demonstrates the ways in which emotionality can be shaped in the school environment. Killick's *Headlands Emotional Literacy Programme (HELP)* therefore constitutes the core of the book under review. The *HELP* programme aims to train the teachers and other school staff in developing the emotional literacy of children in the age range 11 to 16. The concept of emotional literacy is directly related to emotional intelligence, described as our ability to understand both other people's feeling and, just as importantly, our own, and to be able to process emotions and to respond to them effectively. Affectivity is at the core of everything we do in and with our lives. Thus, its development should be also central to edu-

cational programmes. The group of teenage learners who underwent the HELP programme is, in terms of their developmental characteristics, one that perhaps more than any other age group needs this kind of training. Although the programme was created for so-called difficult learners, it can be applied to any group, especially adolescent learners. Adolescence is seen by psychologists and educationalists as arguably the most vulnerable period in one's life, the period of searching for one's identity and one's place within one's immediate peer group and society, a period marked by anxiety and low-self esteem, when the need to be noticed comes very much to the fore.

Killick's book *Emotional Literacy at the Heart of the School Ethos* more than addresses the above aims. As the author himself says, his book aims to:

- explain the ideas that form the foundation of emotional intelligence;
- explain how they might apply in the school setting;
- give a number of practical communication skills that teachers can use to help to develop emotional literacy and encourage cooperation in the classroom (p. 1).

The Author suggests that the book can be used both "as a workbook to promote understanding and develop skills in emotional intelligence" and "as a source of ideas for training and discussing emotional literacy with staff" (p. 2). The text is supplemented with a Power-point presentation on a CD and printable worksheets that can be directly used in training sessions or in the classroom with learners.

The book consists of two parts: Part One: "Creating the Climate for Emotional Literacy" and Part Two: "Communicating Emotional Literacy". The first discusses the theory of emotional literacy on the basis of Goleman's (1998) concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) (1983). This theoretical presentation is illustrated with examples of discussion points and practical activities to better understand the concepts that are crucial to the affective development of learners and creating better ways of communication between learners and teachers and between learners themselves. The Author points out five areas that are crucial for the development of emotional literacy: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social competence and discusses each of these separately. Since there is a direct connection between thinking and feeling, developing the affective dimension of learners' functioning at school (and beyond it) is vital to their academic achievement. Each of five chapters which constitute Part One is supplemented with a set of exercises recapitulating and expanding upon the above concepts and applying them to the classroom context. Additional sources for ideas and references are given to the reader, who might want to read more on specialized aspects of emotional intelligence and emotional literacy.

Part Two of the book presents communication skills as basic to development of emotional literacy or, as Killick puts it, “Effective communication is fundamental to fostering emotional literacy. Emotional communication is not about the intrusion into the private lives of individuals but about how we communicate with each other in the here and now” (p. 96). Killick emphasizes among others the importance of the non-verbal dimension of communication, reflective listening to others which facilitates the feelings of empathy and using effective feedback, which should be beneficial as “Positive feedback builds confidence and relationships” (p. 114). Also, developing internal motivations and collaborative problem-solving in children are conducive to the development of their emotional literacy. Killick then turns our attention to relaxation and attending to various sensory stimuli as promoting thinking more creatively, as he believes it results in a “think good – feel good, feel good – learn good” chain of consequences (p. 149).

The book offers a very extensive discussion of the whole array of factors significant for coping with one’s own or children’s feelings. It looks at positive talk, working with anger, dealing with sadness, loss and depression and overcoming pessimistic thinking. Killick relates these processes to the concepts introduced by cognitive therapy such as thought catching, thought evaluation and positive self-talk, which can be implemented in classroom contexts. The book proposes a set of awareness-raising activities for teachers. One of the most important aspects of emotional literacy is registered by Killick in the learners’ ability to cooperate with their peers. Thus one of the chapters in the book looks at mediation and conflict resolution as well as problem-solving skills in group work. This part of the discussion is complemented with a set of printable worksheets to be directly used in the classroom in interactive and cooperative tasks. The book finishes with a chapter which comments on the need for reflectivity and reflective practice in teachers, and not just in the context of the Headlands School for children who are emotionally and behaviourally disturbed, [= schools for emotionally and behaviourally challenged children] where the HELP project was born and implemented in practice. Killick states that “encouraging reflective practice is an essential part of any school keen to enhance emotional literacy skills” (p. 186).

I can therefore recommend this book to every teacher and teacher trainer. It is not only well-grounded in theory but also offers practical points for discussion and exercises that can be easily implemented by a busy teacher in his/her classroom or in a training course focusing on the development of emotional literacy. It may be profitably used in training courses for FL teachers as it provides interesting topics for discussion which are in addition relevant for the development of the teacher’s classroom and learner awareness. Thus

it could become a useful guide and tool in training programmes for pre-service teachers whose major areas of concern in the initial stages of their professional careers relate very strongly to their own and their learners' affectivity.

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