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BOOK REVIEW

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Bibliography: Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Smith, D. (2019). *All learning is social and emotional: Helping students develop essential skills for the classroom and beyond*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. 197 pages. \$21.08

Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher are professors of educational leadership at San Diego State University and teacher leaders at Health Sciences High and Middle College. Nancy has published numerous books and articles and her research interests include reading, literacy, assessment, intervention, and curriculum design. Douglas has published numerous articles on improving student achievement. Dominique Smith is the chief of educational services and teacher support at Health Sciences High and Middle College. He is a co-author and holds an education doctorate in educational leadership from San Diego State University.

Thesis of the Book

Much as social and emotional learning (SEL) is commonly ascribed to particular fields of study; all learning is social and emotional. From what instructors teach to how they teach and interact, learners derive conclusions that impact their thought processes, perceptions, and performance. Thus, teaching calls for intentional activities that appeal to the domains of learning. An extensive operational framework is vital for the fusion of SEL into the curriculum at all levels to qualify learners for resourcefulness. The authors advocate for a framework with procedures intended to (a) cultivate and reinforce student efficacy, (b) foster emotional regulation, (c) inculcate mental discipline, (d) encourage social skills, and (e) nurture the spirit of communal responsibility.

Summary of the Main Themes in the Book

Straightforward as the learning process might sound, the content to be taught has received much debate over the years. With the majority of schools focusing on academic prowess—a scenario fueled by school ranking and rating procedures, others have extended the bracket to accommodate vocational and workplace skills. The extension depicts a blooming perception “that schools can influence more than just students’ academic content knowledge” (pp. 1-2). Through deliberate activities, teachers can transform the entirety of each child.

Worthwhile learning involves understanding social and emotional skills. According to the authors, such knowledge helps to generate an environment where children can rightly interact with their peers, instructors, and instructional materials. SEL carries a higher overall impact on the learning experiences despite its current smaller audience compared to cognitive learning. Thus, prioritizing the former is bound to accelerate the latter.

SEL emphasizes a cluster of collective inner responses and attributes that brace success within and outside school. Frequently referred to as “soft skills” (p. 2), these attributes are often communicated within the interaction. They include identity and agency, emotional modulation, mental adjustment, as many as others. Therefore, teachers are charged with the responsibility of impacting students’ SEL in planned positive ways.

The authors revealed that identity and agency focus on self-perceptions and self-efficacy, respectively. Classroom instruction should assist learners in understanding their personalities and capabilities to influence the immediate world. This is possible through positive feedback on classroom tasks such as debates, role-plays, and micro-teaching. In that way, the accentuation of learners’ areas of strength generates encouragement, develops confidence, and stimulates resiliency.

Considering emotional modulation, learners should be taught to identify and discern emotions. Along with this should be techniques to deal with the wake of different emotions that impact impulse superintendence and gratification management. These techniques may include helping learners to (a) think positively through occasional class recitations, (b) set life principles and live by them, and (c) seek social assistance. Equally important, classroom restructuring should be carried out to improve tidiness and quietness and mitigate distress. Using Plutchik’s wheel of emotions (p. 49), the authors illustrated some emotions that affect learning and conduct.

SEL necessitates imparting knowledge about cognitive adjustment. By this, learners are helped to participate in ventures that inspire mental work. These are effective platforms for goal setting, resource mobilization, and partnership formation (p. 68) in a bid to arrive at excellence. Along the way, scaffolding can be employed by the teacher to model a learning atmosphere in which learners realize that they are capable of thinking, preparing, focusing, deciding, and organizing ideas.

Inscribed in SEL is the urgency of shaping and maintaining positive relationships. It is a result of equipping learners with “social skills, communication skills, and empathy” (p. 115). These may sprout through team-building engagements such as sports, music, and drama in which caring, sharing, and tolerance are exercised. Besides constructive interdependence, the aforementioned skills are foundational in nurturing future citizens capable of propagating harmony at home, on the job, and in society.

The authors outlined public spirit as another critical aspect of SEL. To them, it is all about “active interest and personal investment in the well-being of one’s communities” (p. 118). Teachers should create situations where learners can rehearse servant leadership, collective responsibility, service learning, and perseverance. These are much obtainable as learners take part in “decision-making processes” (p. 140). By and large, setting up SEL schools would require professional development with a clear purpose.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Authors’ Argument

In expounding their position, the authors insist that SEL cannot be risked in the stewardship of chance. Investments should be devoted to all channels that can facilitate reaching the hearts (emotions) of learners and thereby reaching their minds. Intentional planning should be made by the teachers to create an atmosphere that promotes learning. Several practical examples are given to help the reader grasp the intended idea at each point. These are expressed in simple words that can be clearly understood by an average reader. Nonetheless, the authors are hesitant to direct the reader’s attention to the divine source of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

Recommendation

Based on its educative insights, I would recommend the book to all personnel involved in child upbringing and training. These include teachers, parents, teacher trainees, school administrators, and education officers at different levels. Another category would be spiritual leaders who are charged with teaching the *flock*.

Relationship of the book to other books on the same topic

The book content is coherent with what other known authors have shared on the same topic. For instance, Kessler (2002) identified self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, acceptance, and relationship skills as major aspects of SEL needed by students. Humphrey (2013) advocated for effective feedback, social skills, servant leadership as called for in the book under review.

Visual content of the book

Besides the table of contents, there are also figures and other tables that avail quick glimpses of the written content. At certain points, photographs are provided to enhance visual learning. Similarly, there are takeaways at the end of each chapter in which the authors summarize the entire chapter for an instant review. The bibliography and index at the end of the book are also vivid for the reader’s reference. Especially, the authors labored to provide a special list of books consulted and later on other reference sources and an index. Even though this book is intended for teachers within the K-12 system, it has proven to be useful for other adults as well.

References

- Humphrey, N. (2013). *Social and emotional learning: A critical appraisal*. London, Great Britain: SAGE.
- Kessler, R. (2002). *The soul of education: Helping students find connection, compassion, and character at school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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