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Emotional Literacy, Resilience and a Process for Change in Education: Making the Links Clear

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Abstract:
Emotional literacy can weave through the tapestry of a school to build a culture of respect and responsibility that has classroom practice at its heart. When this is seen as core business and not additional work for teachers involved the effects can be convincing. Emotional literacy can promote powerful learning for schools. Using it as a catalyst for change is timely in light of new syllabus documents, projects such as MindMatters and the desire to provide a more coherent approach to Pastoral Care.

The Community Change Project (CCP) uses an action research model to promote sustainability and community responsibility in regard to student wellbeing. Emotional literacy affects every interaction in a school and is used in this paper as the basis for exploring and understanding the potential impact of the CCP. A group of NSW independent schools chose to research and promote safe, stimulating and inclusive classrooms that nurture learning and psychosocial development as protective factors to enhance resilience and build emotional literacy. The impact of relational and pedagogical factors was explored as a means of delaying the onset of experimentation with drugs.
Schools used the Quality of School Life Survey to initiate an evidence-based approach to interventions targeting pedagogical practice and enhancing student protective factors. This involved several thousand students from Years 5-12 as all students in four schools were surveyed.

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Emotional literacy and a school community

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how emotional literacy can act as a foundation to current and on-going action research in building protective factors in the classroom, to analyse research that informed the Community Change Project planning and development and to outline models for pastoral care and their relationship to learning in the classroom. In so doing other schools will have a framework that they can adapt to meet local needs.

Emotional literacy can be defined as the ability to makes sense of and apply knowledge about our own and others' emotional states with skill and competence. Weare (2004) It involves self –awareness, communication and conflict resolution skills, building healthy relationships, empathy and celebrating success at all levels. In a school community

everyone is influenced by the extent of emotional literacy operating. This applies to the principal, the school executive and staff and students.

An eco-systemic view of emotional literacy recognises that the variables and the outcomes of emotional literacy interrelate and are dynamic. This view is well developed by Groundwater-Smith (2005 p. 2) when she says that "… the intelligent school is a living organism, it is a dynamic system that is more than just the sum of its parts". A school that is attuned to emotional literacy may develop the capacity to decrease bullying, to lesson absenteeism amongst staff and students and develop greater commitment to school.

Emotional literacy can have far reaching effects for example, a school principal who models a high level of interpersonal skills and is optimistic may find that when combined with good leadership that staff is also demonstrating a care and concern for each other that is self-perpetuated. Cherniss (1998) As Beatty as cited in Sharp, (2003 p.6); "People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget the way you made them feel." The principal and staff are crucial to a school and role-model the type of behaviours that students will emulate and therefore it is appropriate that work in the area of emotional literacy starts with the staff. Many approaches focus on working with students however, if students are in an environment where there is no congruence with what they are told this will do little to modify behaviour or change perceptions. Greenberg et el., 2003; Weare, (2005).

One-off parent nights and initiatives do have their place in the pastoral care program of schools. However, to facilitate deep seated change other approaches can overlay both the disparate approach that marks some pastoral care programs in relation to what happens in the classroom and an ad hoc approach to pastoral care issues such as drug education and road safety education. Some schools use 'emotional bandaid' as a means of moving through an array of health issues influencing student wellbeing, rather than developing a holistic approach whereby all layers and dimensions of the school have been permeated. There is evidence that short term interventions have short term outcomes and are not necessarily sustainable. Greenberg et el (2003) One-off approaches often follow a serious incident such as a fatality, misuse of alcohol or an injury and are reactive rather than proactive.

Building protective factors through the classroom

Alternatively, a more comprehensive and powerful model is to focus on the protective factors that build resilience through classroom pedagogy, support inclusive relationships and use systematic planning to support an evidence-based approach over time. Teaching, learning and assessment practices which draw on contemporary pedagogical frameworks such as the New South Wales Department of Education Quality Teaching model (2003), Marzano's Dimensions of Learning (1992) and the Queensland Productive Pedagogies model (2000) acknowledge the value of building relationships. Therefore emotional literacy is clearly at the forefront of what is new in syllabus documents and teacher practice.

Community-based approaches to pastoral care groups complement this emphasis by maximising interaction and promoting growth, facilitate interaction that is exponential, use positive interaction to build resilience and recognise that social instinct is part of being human and the need to be part of a community. The pastoral care group can form a vital component of the pastoral program when inclusion, commitment, consensus, realism and safety are the building blocks used to drive processes and build emotional literacy (Gilmour 2005).

Resilience and emotional literacy depend on the level of connectedness that a student has with others. Often a significant other such as a teacher will be the charismatic adult that a young person needs to build protective factors. Belonging is a key factor of connectedness and when this is nurtured in the classroom young peoples' self-concept and perception about how they are accepted in class is enhanced. When connectedness and resilience are high this can diminish the possibility of problematic substance abuse Fuller, (2001).

The classroom and the quality of teaching and learning should receive the necessary attention that it deserves in a school as this is the place where a student spends most time in the school day. Some indications as to how it features is in regard to meeting agendas, professional development, and on-going professional discourse. When teaching and learning and is the focus not only will this result in psychosocial and learning gains but it will enable teachers to feel that they are getting their real work done. This can be achieved by building a culture of collaboration and working with not on the school community Ainscow, (1998) Weare, (2004). This can include enabling schools to determine their own agenda as to major issues they want to address. Once achieved schools can then decide how they want to address them as one part of the matrix for a whole school approach.

When schools focus on building a vocabulary of professional discourse about pedagogy this can provide a base for improved practice because it is possible to name the elements that make a teacher effective. Often effective teachers are not aware of all of the elements that make them really effective Ayres, (2000). Given that effective relationships and emotional literacy are central to this process time spent on these areas are most beneficial.

When the core business of teaching, learning and assessment is at the centre of staff room conversation that includes aspects of the affective domain this can lift morale, if teachers can see what is happening in the classroom is producing positive results. Effective pedagogy such as using information communication technology as a learning tool can engage learners and provide a context whereby students can feel passionate about their learning. As Fuller, (2005) emphasised students and particularly adolescents need a measure of excitement in the classroom.

Abraham, (1999) outlined how environments where there is a high degree of job control promote emotional literacy. This principle was adopted for the CCP whereby the schools and teams involved identified interventions which they believed held most meaning to the school community. Goleman, (1995) identified what he regarded as another facet and benefit of emotional intelligence. This is the ability to enter "flow", or to harness the emotions to learn and then perform at peak performance. Such attributes have major implications given the number of teachers who report that students are disengaged or that behaviour management issues are increasing.

Time on task is recognised as a feature of the effective classroom and is also identified in contemporary pedagogical frameworks. Ayres (2000) Hay McBer (2000) Fuller, (2001) described the key social competencies that underpin emotional literacy and resilience. These included elements such as effective problem solving strategies, emotional regulation, personal mastery, the accurate interpretation of social cues and the ability to attend to others and transferring social concepts into effective habits.

High levels of emotional literacy can sensitise teachers and students to the emotional climate within a classroom. The way that emotions present in the classroom takes a high priority because it is essential to develop the right learning environment for students. The level of engagement in the classroom is a crucial factor to learning. A student who is anxious, stressed or alienated cannot learn because the ability to store, recall and utilise information is damaged and the ability to make clear decisions is impaired. In a situation where a student perceives a threat, information reaches the amygdala and the perception of an associated threat means that cortisol and adrenaline are released as in the "fight" response. This overrides the cortex meaning it will not be able to process and take in information effectively Buggy (2004).

During adolescence the emotions take on a new significance and the ability to harness the emotions in em. Emotional literacy can provide the bridge between the cognitive and affective zones when school communities are aware of its potential Antidote (2005). At its best emotional literacy can prevent angry outbreaks, build optimism, prevent withdrawal, a sense of disempowerment and negative beliefs about personal capacity. Young people experience enough self doubt as they go through the process of searching for and experimenting with identities and at this time brain processes such as synaptic pruning, restructuring of the frontal lobes. Some students may also struggle with the response triggered by the amygdala to a situation perceived as a threat such as a put down and may act and then think after the event Jensen, (1995).Clearly, the complexities that come with adolescence can make emotional literacy a valuable asset.

According to Marzano, (1992) building a sense of student acceptance in the classroom enables students to form positive attitudes and perceptions about learning. When combined with teaching strategies such as co-operative learning this fosters acceptance and promotes a strong sense of understanding between group members. Student-centered approaches to learning provides fertile grounds for building social and emotional learning as does problem-based learning that emphasises the link between thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Pasi, (2001) The New South Wales Model of Quality Teaching developed by Ladwig and Gore encompasses a quality learning environment. Elements of the model to incorporate into the classroom involve communicating high expectations, valuing each student's contributions and encouraging the students to take risks to extend learning or express opinions.

The importance of the learner as central to the learning process is emphasised through the *Productive Pedagogies* cited by Lingard, (2002). This is a key component of the *New Basics Project* being trialled in Queensland characterised by intellectual quality, connectedness, a supportive classroom environment, recognition of difference and underpinned by an acceptance of risk-taking as a learner Hayes, (2002). In this framework social support is characterised in ways such as a climate of mutual respect and trust and conflict. This type of learning environment builds the capacity for protective factors but also enables students to model this through academic resilience, whereby a student "bounces back" from set backs at school, manages pressure and stress at school Martin, (2005).

An holistic model of pastoral care with teaching, learning and assessment at its core is best achieved through the development of strong school-home links where the parents are seen as powerful allies and partners in the learning process. In this alternate model pastoral care penetrates all levels and dimensions of the school whereby it is acknowledged that all staff impact on students' pastoral needs both in and out of the classroom.

Cheers (2004), asserted that protective factors can be built and maintained in a classroom that considers learning from four key perspectives;

- What do students need from the curriculum?
- What do students need from their teachers?
- What do students need from their learning experiences?
- What do students need from the School community?

This framework promotes a student-centered approach incorporating authentic teaching and assessment opportunities whereby students have a voice and are provided with choices that match their ability, strengths and areas for development. It also required a degree of empathy on the part of staff and this is a key feature of emotional literacy. In using such a set of questions students are seen from many perspectives and as young people with particular needs. This includes achieving developmental tasks but also ensuring they are affirmed and feeling valued.

So what is at the heart of the matter? Strong relationships in the classroom and at school are at the heart of building a positive classroom climate that will enable students to achieve learning outcomes. Emotional literacy acts as a lever for building effective relationships. The contribution of the affective domain in the classroom to a student's sense of connectedness and willingness to engage in learning and as a feature of effective teaching are well researched. The potential to contribute to the protective factors in regard to resiliency are also widely acknowledged Ayres, (2000) Fuller, (1998) Hargreaves et el (2001) Hay McBer, (2000) Nadge, (2002) Rowe & Rowe (2002).

The research noted supports a range of key features as pivotal to building strong relationships and rapport with students in the classroom. As these are two essential ingredients for building connectedness and engagement they cannot be overlooked.

Essential ingredients for building connectedness and engagement include a commitment to teaching, thorough content knowledge, a sense of responsibility to students, passion and enthusiasm for ones' subject and high yet realistic expectations. Also crucial are clear classroom guidelines applied fairly, time on task, mutual respect, genuine interest in the students' lives beyond the classroom and connecting learning to the real world of the student, recognising and supporting difference amongst students and developing habits of mind such as perseverance, self-regulation and empathy Marzano, (1997) Hay McBer, (2000).

Carr-Gregg, (2002) expressed the needs of adolescence in even more simple terms. He discussed how they need to feel valued, to know that others will listen to and care about them. These are some of the hallmarks that characterise good teaching. Hargreaves et al. (2001) reported that good teachers place a high level of significance on their relationships with students and want others to know how much they value taking an interest in students outside of the classroom and take time to help the student feel safe and secure.

A series of studies by Rowe & Rowe, Hill & Rowe and Hill et al., as cited by Rowe & Rowe, (2000) confirmed the significance of the teacher in relation to their ability for greatest impact over what happens in the classroom in regard to student achievement. In Victorian English and Mathematics primary and secondary classrooms, the class or teacher effect was

attributed to 45.5%, 37.8%, 54.7% and 52.7% respectively. This surpassed the impact made by student background, school factors and administration factors.

Nadge has also noted the importance of the affective domain as outlined below.

> "Teachers will identify with a colleague who reports that, 'It is obvious that children will work harder and do things – even odd things like adding fractions – when they feel listened to and supported. 'In some schools, fractions and listening and support are not used in the same sentences**: the pastoral and academic seem to be separate systems with different agendas, processes and languages. The psycho-social development of students is often seen as the province of the welfare staff and pastoral care provision is made through programmes and policies that are not normally integrated into classroom practice.** It is as though attention to psycho-social development through pastoral care takes place on one side of the classroom door, learning on the other" (Nadge, 2002, p. 5).

The marrying of pastoral and educational goals not only supports best practice in the classroom but also publicly acknowledges the impact of well thought out approaches to drug education. Drug education has become integral to this paradigm shift. The development of proactive and dynamic approaches in drug education has also brought structural change and new leadership roles in the school executive. This has enabled staff to see the interrelationship between issues such as bullying, drug use, mental health, and emotional literacy, help seeking skills and a range of inter and intra personal skills. Subsequently, more holistic approaches to these issues are being developed in schools with an explicit focus on pedagogical practice incorporating emotional literacy.

The development of resilience, emotional intelligence Goleman, (1995) and social competencies in young people is not only linked to long term occupational and life success, but also associated with the prevention of substance abuse, violence and suicide. Resilient young people are able cope successfully with challenges; take an active stance toward an obstacle or difficulty; demonstrate the capacity to develop a range of strategies and skills to bear on the problem, which can be used in a flexible way and use persistence and a positive approach to solving problems that can be resolved or managed Nadge (2002). Therefore, well-planned steps taken to enhance resilience that also provide opportunity for student input is moving in the right direction.

A further element to the CCP backdrop is current directions in education. Resources developed by the Office of the Board of Studies NSW such as syllabus documents and the *K-10 Framework* provide a strong impetus for teachers to move towards more student-centered approaches to learning, that will cater more effectively for the range of learning styles that students bring to the classroom. Currently Years 7-10 syllabus documents released in New South Wales are modelled on an outcomes based approach that require a new focus on teaching, learning and assessment. Outcomes based learning implies that all students are achieving along a continuum and therefore the teacher's ability to engage students in meaningful teaching and learning strategies will enable students to show what they know and are able to do based on the stage outcomes that they are working towards. For example a student in Year 10 may be working towards Stage 4 outcomes in some areas, whereas another student in the same class may be working towards stage 6 outcomes through an acceleration program.

Within this approach marks and performance also take on new meaning and this can facilitate student's self-efficacy. This is because the pass-fail mentality can be replaced by describing in clear language what student can do and how they can improve to reach the next level. New assessment practices coined by the Board of Studies as "assessment for learning" also empower the student as they have the potential for direct input into self, peer and group assessment. These opportunities provide a strong platform to build positive relationships, and value-add to the pastoral capacity of the classroom in enhancing learning and psycho-social outcomes when facilitated within a well structured supportive classroom environment.

Nadge, (2002) reviewed research in the area of intelligence and learning, and discussed how we have moved away from learning as a linear, technical activity to one relying upon ways of seeing oneself and of reacting to challenge. This provides an excellent basis for building and enhancing students' resilience both in relation to personal factors and fostering peer and adult support. Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence and Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences have broadened perspectives about the contribution and interrelationship between the cognitive and affective domains and how to tap into these in a conscious and overt way to support students' well-being.

The complexities of an effective drug education program have been clearly articulated through the *Guidelines for School Implementation of a Performance Measurement Framework for School Drug Education* (2001). This document written by Erebus Consulting for the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs involves the measuring a diverse range elements such as teacher skills and knowledge, teacher attitudes and values; empathetic engagement with students; teaching for connectedness; social responsibility; real world connectedness; and active development of resilience.

These elements cited sit within a particular school dimension and include student well-being, learning, teaching, monitoring and evaluation, leadership and management, parent and family participation, community partnerships and curriculum. In making judgements about the degree to which each element is achieved corresponding pointers are analysed in relation to the school context.

Whilst Personal Development Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) is the key learning area (KLA) designated the content for personal skills, an understanding of self and drug education in an explicit way other possibilities exist. In terms of emotional literacy all classrooms have the capacity to incorporate it either implicitly or explicitly. This involves cross-curricular approaches and working in a complementary way with the pastoral care program. The time has never been better to teach for and about emotional and social skills across KLAs and to develop student's protective factors both in an explicit and implicit manner.

Application and processes for the CCP

Evidence suggests that the teaching of issues such as drug education through the health component of PDHPE is tokenistic, with inadequate time devoted to it due to the broad range of issues to be covered. Many students view the current approach to drug education as a "tick-and-flick" exercise that has little relevance to their lives. From the students' perspective teacher credibility and hypocritical role models confronting youth also make formal drug education less valid Erebus Consulting (2001). Therefore, teaching social and emotional skills across the curriculum will have more meaning to students, particularly when

it contains activities such as circle time and peer drug-education Weare (2004) Antidote (2003).

The new NSW Years 7-10 PDHPE syllabus, provides a renewed opportunity to make drug education more meaningful through an integrated approach that moves away from the "silos" approach of covering isolated topics. This holds true for mental health, sexuality, drug education, road safety education and to some extent nutrition education. The syllabus employs an organisational strategy whereby the skills of problem-solving, communicating, planning and decision making form a backbone for syllabus content enabling interrelated issues to be explored through a series of units working towards a more realistic approach to education. This provides a challenge to teachers of PDHPE over the next three to four years, as the new syllabus does not need to be fully implemented until 2006.

It is these common understandings that have proved to be a powerful driver in the CCP, with the participating schools choosing to focus on what happens in the classroom as a means of enhancing protective factors in relation to resilience. In essence this is not only enabling teachers to do what they regard as "real work" but also to achieve outcomes related to drug education within the pastoral care framework.

A range of Commonwealth funded projects have further enabled schools to act on a sense of urgency in relation to the development of a range local-school-community drug summits. Projects under the banner of the National Schools Drug Education Strategy (NSDES) have also enabled schools the opportunity to develop a range of materials and work with members of the school community in new ways. Further to this the release of the Commonwealth *Mindmatters* resource has enabled teachers to explore the interrelated nature of health and pastoral issues. It also emphasises the importance of comprehensive responses to these issues by schools.

In New South Wales this responsibility aligns itself with the roles of pastoral care staff in key executive roles in a growing number of schools. The impetus for the CCP came from teachers who recognised that to increase sustainability and to really make a difference to the lives of the students more was needed. There was also great interest about how to reach deeper levels of change. A number of schools were already modelling best practice in relation to building strong community partnerships, enhancing community involvement and the implementing of a range of interventions to assist at risk students and were ready to take the challenge of the next step.

The Independent schools involved in CCP used an action research model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Nunan (1989), as quoted in *Teachers' Voices,* A. Burns and S. Hoods (1995). This enables schools involved to target a focus area, develop a research plan, gather some baseline data as evidence, develop, implement and evaluate one or more interventions and measure the outcomes before evaluating the outcomes of the project. Built into the action research cycle are critical reflection, action planning and an on-going process of reviewing and acting. There are four basic steps involved and these are planing, action, observation and reflection.

Phase one of the project ran to the end of 2003 with seminars for teams involved at the beginning and end of the project. Schools identified that the CCP is part of a bigger on-going plan that will help to "kick-start" other initiatives pertaining to school structures, teacher culture, student learning outcomes, professional learning, school leadership and

pastoral care program development. Each school chose to focus on the classroom as the place to make the strongest gains. The intervention across schools included the introduction of a program for resilience, an exploration of the impact of the language of resilience, the introduction of a thinking curriculum, the development of explicit quality criteria, building social support, using a range of taxonomies such as Bloom and Gardner and approaches to differentiating the curriculum, identification of new teaching strategies incorporating peer and self-assessment and professional development for staff about the social, emotional and developmental needs of students.

The CCP promotes staff working collaboratively in teams. Hargreaves (2001) supports the work of Fullan, (1999) Newman & Wehlage, (1995) and Helsby, (1999) that strong collaborative cultures in teaching are linked to effective learning. Collaborative work also enables teachers to stimulate creativity, take risks, gain confidence through emotional support and energise and inspire each other. Many teachers comment that their best planning and work is achieved when working in partnership with colleagues Hargreaves, (2001). With this in mind each step of the process for the CCP involves working in teams.

As outlined above the model being used for the project involves the identification of a focus area. The possibilities for the collection of baseline data included the administration of a questionnaire, conducting of interviews or focus groups. The research plan determines the parameters of the project in relation to the how, what, when and where. The project evaluation will involve a combination of methods as outlined above in relation to the collection of evidence. All schools except one chose to use the Quality School Life Survey and the other designed their own survey. Data from the survey provided substance to hunches that schools had about particular year groups and enabled another set of interventions to be planned.

The questionnaire helped schools explore aspects such as general satisfaction about school, sense of achievement, status, identity, adventure, negative affect, opportunity and teacher-student relations.

Opportunities to showcase the project process and outcomes included conference presentations and in-house leading and mentoring. The real impact of the project will be in the behaviour, attitudes and beliefs of students in school and further development of resilience amongst students. The potential of this project is unlimited and provides many avenues for teachers and students to make a difference and to provide students with the skills to face challenges in their lives.

Academic Care

Phase two of the project involved the development of a Charter for Academic Care. Academic Care is a construct that can guide schools interested in maximising the potential of the classroom to build protective factors. Research shows a strong need for all teachers to better understand their pastoral role and its impact on student learning and well-being. It encourages continuing discourse to promote the integration of pastoral and academic domains of all schools. Academic Care enhances student learning, well-being and resilience through pedagogies sympathetic to student needs, and embedded in learning experiences. The development of the charter was spread across several months although schools involved only met as a whole group twice. It emphasises the role of schools and teachers but could well be extended to also focus on the students.

It was recognised that schools that promote Academic Care provide opportunities to develop an understanding of the strong links between learning, well-being and resilience, believe that all students can succeed in their learning; monitor student connectedness to the learning environment and stimulate student engagement with learning. Schools embarking on this process also provide learning experiences that are relevant to their lives, foster high expectations of all learners, engage staff and students in dialogue about understanding learning, enhance positive psycho-social and developmental outcomes through protective factors, utilise a range of support networks and resources and implement structures and programs in response to diverse student needs. Most importantly schools model respect and fairness. This involves skills for emotional literacy at all levels.

Teachers who promote Academic Care use pedagogies that strengthen the links between learning, well-being and resilience, support individual needs and learning styles, offer authentic learning experiences, encourage opportunities for reflection in learning, embed assessment for learning within classroom practices and develop a quality learning environment where students enjoy learning. As a consequence teachers are motivated, self-directed and feel empowered to take risks as learners. At this level emotional literacy is evident through clear and consistent behaviour and learning expectations and the development relationships that allow all students to feel valued, safe and supported.

Academic care is the way of the future in terms of building sustainable change and gaining commitment of an entire staff in regard to teaching, learning and assessment. Each element of academic care involves social and emotional learning and confirms its importance. Academic care and therefore emotional literacy has the potential to provide affective and cognitive outcomes for staff and students and provides a nexus between the pastoral and the academic domains of the school.

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