

Enhancing Emotional Literacy Through PSD

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Introduction

In a world which is continually changing, different forms of literacy are necessary to give us the proper skills to deal with a wide range of issues. While oracy, literacy, numeracy, computer and digital literacy together with other kinds of literacies are essential, Emotional Literacy is crucial. Emotional Literacy is the ability to recognise, understand and express our emotions. Nowadays, the need for Emotional Literacy is ever increasing and helping children to become emotionally literate, is one of the best investments that we can make.

Emotional Literacy helps to lay the foundation for a better society. Various studies underline the importance of Emotional Literacy in students. It is considered the key to help students reach self-actualisation and live a better life. The way children mature emotionally and the skills they learn to manage those feelings will influence their abilities to fulfil their potential in their life, be able to learn, solve difficulties, face challenges and acquire knowledge about how they feel about themselves (Killich, 2006). Emotional Literacy is fostered in Personal and Social Development (PSD), a subject facilitated in primary and secondary schools in Malta and Gozo. PSD promotes Emotional Literacy through both its content and methodology, thus contributing greatly to help children become emotionally literate.

Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Literacy

Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Literacy are terms being increasingly used in education and other spheres of life like management and organisations. A short course entitled 'Emotional Intelligence: Listening to Children and Young People's Needs' was held at the Gozo Campus of the University of Malta in 2011. The course covered basic concepts in Emotional Intelligence along with the basic techniques in developing Emotional Intelligence skills in those working with children and young

people. There was an emphasis on the importance of empathy, emotional awareness and resilience. The course was coordinated by Dr Erika Ferrario, a lecturer within the Department of Human Sciences at the University of Milan-Bicocca (Italy) and a visiting researcher at the European Centre for Education Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health at the University of Malta.

Emotional Intelligence is a relatively new concept. Salovey and Mayer coined the term Emotional Intelligence, defining it as:

“a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (Salovey and Mayer, 1990: 189).

Goleman (1995) then popularised the concept of Emotional Intelligence. Later, Salovey and Mayer (1997) defined Emotional Intelligence as being made up of four distinct branches which have to do with perceiving emotions, facilitating thought, understanding emotions and managing emotions. Afterwards, Steiner (1997) coined the term Emotional Literacy. Both terms were sometimes used interchangeably as if they refer to the same thing. But Steiner and Perry outline a number of differences and regard Emotional Literacy as:

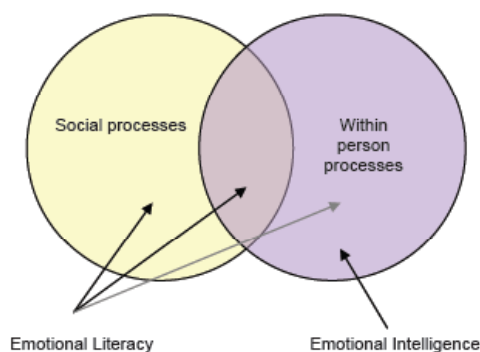
“the ability to understand one's own emotions, to listen to and empathise with others and to express emotions effectively” (Camilleri et al., 2012: 21).

According to Steiner and Perry, Emotional Literacy helps to improve relationships, builds loving possibilities among persons, encourages a community feeling and leads to co-operation which can be beneficial to all (Camilleri et al., 2012). So Emotional Literacy has a lot of potential for the well-being of individuals and to improve the quality of relationships with others.

Gillum (2010) insists that while Emotional Intelligence refers to an individual's emotional abilities, Emotional Literacy defines a process of interaction which builds understanding. Matthews also maintains that definitions of Emotional Intelligence are "basically individualistic in nature" (Camilleri et al., 2012: 21). The focal point of Emotional Intelligence is on the individual aspect of humans' emotional development, while Emotional Literacy integrates both the individual and social aspects of human beings. Emotional Literacy retains communication and social interaction with others at its heart and considers them very crucial. According to Steiner and Perry when viewing all Emotional Literacy definitions, what is common between them is the point that though "emotions are experienced individually, they arise out of interactions with others" (Camilleri et al., 2012: 21).

Gillum (2010) concludes that according to different researchers and professionals, definitions of Emotional Intelligence put an emphasis on the individual's qualities while Emotional Literacy definitions make reference to internal processes, social processes and the interaction between the two.

Moreover, Gillum states that although Mayer and Salovey maintain that Emotional Intelligence is partly the ability to recognise and manage other people's emotions, they do not differentiate between the pro and anti-social applications of this ability. For instance, someone who employs Mayer and Salovey's ability to manage other people's emotions in order to persuade a person to buy something which he does not truly require is



Differences between definitions of Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Literacy (Gillum, 2010: 16).

regarded as equivalent, in Emotional Intelligence, to someone who uses the same ability to support a person who is facing a difficult situation. In contrast according to Gillum, Steiner connects emotional literacy with a person's capability to love and appreciate oneself and others and to accept love and respect; so it is clearly value laden.

Why is Emotional Literacy Important?

The development of Emotional Literacy is like a journey. To become emotionally literate, there is a continuous process: the child must learn to recognise basic emotions, progress to understand those emotions, handle and express emotions and finally, develop empathy.

Matthews (2006) also emphasises that it is fundamental to develop the ability to identify your emotions and the feelings in others, as well as to control these emotions 'to assimilate them in thought.' Children gain significantly when they learn the vocabulary which describes their feelings. In fact, Fox and Harper Lentini (2006: 1) insist that

"children who have a large vocabulary of 'feeling words' can better express their emotions using language rather than through problem behaviour" (Fox and Lentini, 2006: 1).

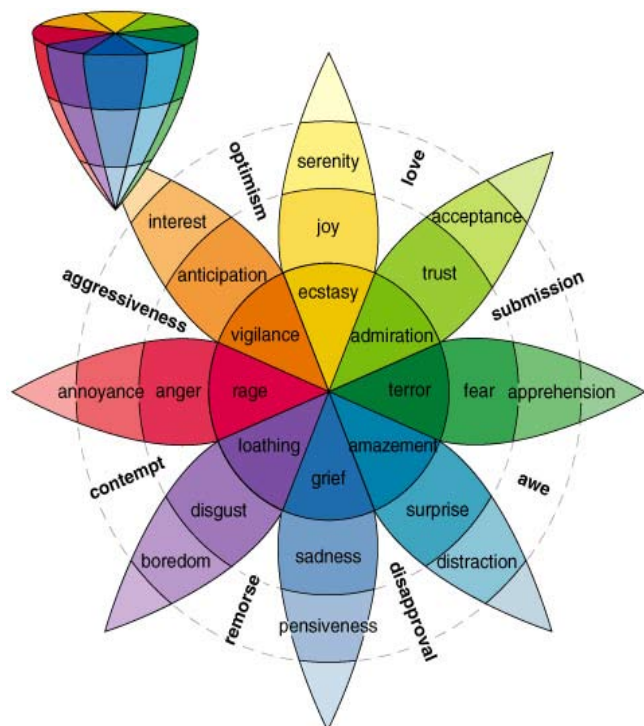
According to Steiner (2003), Emotional Literacy is Emotional Intelligence with a heart. He insists that training to be emotionally literate is centred in the heart and consists of five main skills:

1) *Know your feelings*

It is very important to identify your feelings, the cause of these emotions and their strength. If you identify these three important things, then you can say how your feelings are affecting you and other people around you.

2) *Have a heartfelt sense of empathy*

This is the ability to "feel for" other people in recognising what other people are feeling and why they are feeling that way. When we show empathy with others, their emotions resonate within us. This skill is fundamental for good human relationships.



Feelings.

(Source: <http://www.socialliteracytoday.com> - accessed October 2013).

3) *Manage and control emotions*

To become emotionally literate, it is not enough to know your feelings and the feelings of other people around you. You must know the impact of emotional expression or the lack of it, on other persons. It is also essential to learn how to state with reassurance our positive feelings and how to express and control our negative feelings in a way which does not harm other people. You have to learn effective ways to deal with strong feelings like anger or fear.

4) *Repair emotional damage*

As we are human beings, there may be occasions where we make emotional mistakes and hurt other people's feelings. So, we must learn how to identify our mistakes, shoulder responsibility, take action by making corrections and apologising. These tasks are significant because if we do not take heed of them, our mistakes can hinder our relationships with other people.

5) *Putting it together – emotional interactivity*

Finally, if we learn these necessary skills, we develop 'emotional interactivity'. This means that we will be able to sense the emotions of others and interact with them effectively.

Emotions influence how healthy we are, the way we learn, the manner we behave and also the relationships we build with others. Sherwood (2008) claims that Emotional Literacy is vital in education for the students' academic and life success. She insists that emotional literacy may well help raise attainment but, more significantly, it is envisaged to provide the foundation stone for a healthier and better society in the future.



Emotional Literacy is emotional intelligence with a heart - (Steiner, 2003).

One of the significant skills required for Emotional Literacy is empathy. When one is capable of showing empathy to others and is supportive, one can communicate better with others around him and consequently, one can build and maintain good relationships (Killick, 2006).

Bruce (2010) insists that two important elements in the development of emotional literacy are self-awareness and self-esteem. She maintains that students with sound self-esteem are more resilient to handle challenges, risks and difficulties they may face in their life. All this shows the importance of Emotional Literacy. Weare (2004) states that children can be helped to build a positive self-image by aiding them to focus on themselves, their talents and strengths. In fact, this is done through

Personal and Social Development. In PSD, self-worth is seen as crucial for the development of the children's healthy lifestyle. PSD aims to empower children to feel positive about themselves, feel valued, recognise their achievements and celebrate them as well.

The main benefits of Emotional Literacy include the following:

1. It helps children to get the best out of themselves and out of others and to co-operate more with others;
2. It increases the children's self-confidence;
3. It enhances the children's personal well-being: children are helped to tolerate frustration better and get in fewer litigations, children become happier, calmer, more successful; improve their relationships to get on better with others (Weare, 2004);
4. It enables students to manage and control their own behaviour; this has an impact on their behaviour at school and hence on their learning. In fact, research evidence shows that there is a great link between Emotional Literacy and improved behaviour. Weare (2004) insists that Emotional Literacy helps children with difficulties to improve their behaviour and thus feel more inclusive at school;
5. It enables children to be more focused and helps them obtain better academic achievements;
6. It helps children to become resilient and to face challenges and solve difficulties more effectively;
7. It increases workplace effectiveness. In the workplace there is an increasing emphasis on co-operation and communication skills, management skills and successful relationships. As there is rapid continuous change, work can be more stressful. By being emotionally literate, people enjoy many advantages because they can deal better with these changes and challenges by being more resilient, adaptable and flexible;
8. It helps children to become good citizens, more socially minded and with a great sense of belonging to the community;
9. It transforms society into a better place where people understand others, show tolerance and practise a sense of empathy and care.

Characteristics of emotionally literate persons

According to Rudd (2008), people who develop Emotional Literacy have the following characteristics. They tend to:

1. be more happy
2. show more confidence
3. manage and control their emotions
4. recognise the emotions of other people and show empathy
5. communicate better
6. be able to understand others' opinions
7. be capable of saying 'No' in inappropriate circumstances
8. be more resilient
9. be more capable to handle stress
10. be skilled to resolve conflicts
11. be more successful in relationships with others
12. have leadership qualities
13. be more successful in their career

Personal and Social Development

Emotional Literacy is promoted through PSD in the primary and secondary schools. Personal and Social Development is a subject facilitated in schools in Malta and Gozo. The mission statement of the PSD syllabus states that PSD,

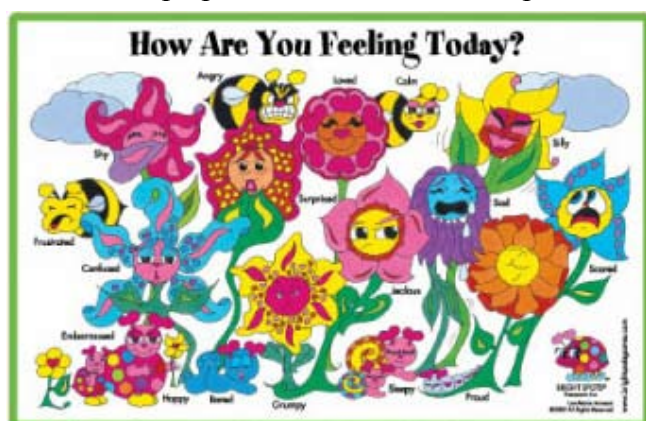
"aims at empowering students to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes which will enable them to live and participate fruitfully and effectively in their environment"

(Abela, 2002: 3)

Personal and Social Development is student orientated. Children at primary level embark on a journey whereby they begin to learn about themselves as developing individuals. The topics in the PSD syllabus address the students' needs. The main topics are: group building, myself, relationships, citizenship, growing up and health and safety. Consequently, PSD helps children to develop attitudes and skills like self-awareness, building confidence, Emotional Literacy, good communication, building good relationships, co-operating with others, respect, celebrating diversity, resolving conflicts, responsibility, decision-making skills and safety. Other social skills are also

imparted through the PSD methodology. Some of these include turn-taking, listening, helping others, appreciating each other and resolving simple moral dilemmas.

From my experience as a PSD teacher, students show great interest in PSD sessions. They regard Personal and Social Development as an interesting and interactive subject. In my opinion, PSD is very relevant to the children's lives since they are constantly being encouraged to participate in discussions and activities, share their ideas and opinions, be creative and learn skills which eventually equip them to become happy and fulfilled individuals, prepared for concrete life experiences.



During PSD sessions, students are seated in the form of a circle. According to Roffey this format is very important because it represents connection and inclusion where no one is left out and encourages unity and respect for others (Camilleri et al., 2012). Muscat's (2006) National Evaluation of the PSD programme points out that when sitting in a small group circle set-up, students feel more appreciated. Moreover, this kind of arrangement fosters communication, interaction and empathy. Empathy provides the ability to recognise what other people are feeling and is the foundation to care for others. The roots of generosity, kindness, sympathy, caring and compassion are all found in empathy (Killick, 2006). Through PSD, children learn the skill of empathy, an ability which lies at the heart of Emotional Literacy. Indeed, empathy is a significant skill in developing Emotional Literacy.

In PSD, there is an emphasis on learning by doing through experiential learning. Students are learning from experience through role-play, case

scenarios and other activities. Matthews (2006) insists that there are many benefits when students have opportunities to learn through experiences. Since during PSD sessions students are actively interacting, this means that great work is done on Emotional Literacy because students are continually involved in the learning process (Camilleri et al., 2012). Moreover, learning experiences must be processed and processing is very important in PSD sessions.

Processing in PSD and Emotional Literacy

As PSD focuses on eliciting, facilitating and processing rather than teaching, it differentiates itself from other subjects (Camilleri et al., 2012). Emotional Literacy is developed through processing during PSD sessions. During processing, students use communication skills to express themselves and their emotions, use listening skills, understand others and learn negotiation strategies. Ideas, together with attitudes, are challenged. Since processing enables students to 'integrate and internalise' the experiences they get during the different activities, they are empowered "to transfer the learned skills to real-life situations" (Camilleri et al., 2012: 28).

Processing in PSD helps to foster an emotionally engaging setting where effective communication takes place as children are left free to express their emotions, thoughts and opinions. Processing helps children to develop intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness which is crucial in primary and secondary years, in order to become emotionally literate individuals. Through processing, children learn to understand themselves better and to listen to other people, thus recognising that others can have different opinions and therefore they obtain a better understanding of themselves and of other people (Camilleri et al., 2012). Being aware and able to understand themselves and other's feelings enable more effective interaction. Through processing, students also acquire an essential skill which is listening. Bocchino insists that listening is an important skill which students need in order to develop Emotional Literacy (Camilleri et al., 2012). Indeed, processing promotes learning from experience, encourages practical learning, ensures empowerment and enhances quality of life.

Conclusion

Studies show clear evidence of the numerous benefits of Emotional Literacy. By being emotionally literate, people are able to make their emotions work for them and other people, instead of against them. So, they are skilled at managing challenging emotional situations that sometimes lead to arguing and hurting others and they learn to enjoy caring, optimistic and joyful emotions instead. Emotional Literacy improves relationships with other people and builds caring possibilities among people, thus facilitating the feeling of community.



In PSD sessions, students are seated in the form of a circle.

Personal and Social Development promotes Emotional Literacy through both its contents and delivery. As a PSD teacher, I am very enthusiastic to facilitate PSD sessions which empower children to enhance their holistic well-being, help them to become emotionally literate, develop their talents and potential, improve their self-esteem and develop other skills which will be beneficial for their life experiences. Consequently, children look forward to PSD sessions with great enthusiasm.

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