



***REVIEW: Carmel Cefai & Valeria Cavioni, Social and Emotional Education in Primary School: Intergrating Theory And Research Into Practice, New York And London, Springer, ISBN: 978-1-4614-8752-4 , 2014, Pp.181***

**Charmaine Agius Ferrante**

This book is positive and carries a message of optimism for all members of a school community. It is about children, teachers, parents, their feelings, thoughts, desires, well-being and learning. From the very outset of the book the reader is taken fully on board and develops a clear understanding of the importance of Social-Emotional Education (SEE), as presented by the authors, in the twenty-first century. Educational research reports often end with recommendations for what ‘policy makers’ should do. Clearly linking research policy and practice is vital, but we often seem to over simplify the relationship between them. This book is a fascinating read because it supports educationalists engaged in teaching, planning and curriculum development. The educationists are informed of the social and emotional processes in education as well as in the formation of socially, emotionally and academically competent and resilient students. The book adopts a comprehensive whole school approach to the teaching of SEE, integrating it into the curriculum and teaching at an individual, classroom and school level. This sits well in our inclusive school climate. Innovatively this book includes SEE interventions with students experiencing difficulties together with an awareness of the emotional life and well-being of teachers and parents in their child’s education. The use of educational checklists enhances and supports self-development of the individual within a whole school community.

This book is broadly split into three parts. The first major section of this book begins with a useful introduction to the rise of research together with evidence-based practice and provides an overview of The SEE framework for primary schools. Cefai’s (2007) universal framework of resilience sits very well with both the social and emotional

learning and positive psychology and the principles of inclusive education, as presented in this first section. Interestingly the authors link the principles of inclusive education within the values and practices of SEE curriculum creating a very strong argument for the curriculum to be a ‘hammer of justice and freedom’ (Oliver 2004). This rings very true in my own experience of debates with in inclusive education; the feeling that as well as engaging with policy makers, education researchers should also be radical advocates. The key message of the experience is that today we are still struggling to see the reality of inclusive education and to come to terms with the measures that need to be taken on the levels of policy, culture, practice and finance. Further investigation of these topics will improve theory, research, and practice for SEE education, which will benefit all students. There is a need to see schools not from the ‘centre’ of the schools but from a standpoint that may give us a broader and deeper viewpoint

In the next section the authors introduce SEE in the curriculum as a broad ‘approach’ suggesting teachers and students take responsibility for creating and being participating members of a ‘caring’ classroom community. Learning and working together can change things and can enable change. Embedding SEE into the present curriculum will require change but will be enabling for teachers, students and parents. The ideas presented and explored are aimed at helping teachers to reflect on their current practice and develop new ways of working, through considering this approach within the practice of whole class social learning.

The final part looks at the engagement of a whole school environment and teachers taking responsibility for both the learning and the well-being of their students, together with parents. The topic SEE is equally relevant to all stakeholders and it can be argued that enabling social and emotional competences are important for all those who work in education, in either a formal or informal capacity.

The concluding chapter links the school to the wider community and presents some cross-cutting themes which connect the SEE framework presented in this book to realities faced by today’s school children and their teachers. The direct and practical approach together with the authors linking research and theory to practice, provides for an insightful and practical teaching tool. The authors suggest an integrated psycho-educational

framework of social and emotional well-being, one which is based on health, growth, resilience and the need for “both Head and Heart in education” (p. 160). The position the authors have adopted around the necessity of building a caring school culture is an interesting concept and requires in-depth research within our local context of inclusive education.

A view of SEE that is embedded in culture has emerged through the concept of narrative. The stories, legend or folk tale that end each chapter further the exploration of SEE and unravel the meaning of the discourse being a process that is interested in the learner and provides a platform for action and change. The idea of cultural stories as a starting place for teachers to know the cultural structures of what it means to be a teacher in today’s schools climate. This book invites self-reflection and in my case, reflection on the wider work of inclusive education. On a more objective level it provides an evidence-based need to implement of SEE within our primary school curriculum without delay.

The authors’ clear and engaging writing style makes this book very accessible, especially to parents. This book is an asset in many different teaching settings within primary school education and a wonderful complete reference for educationist to have on hand.