

Review by Stephen Bigger. Journal of Inservice Education 2006.

Matthews, Brian

Engaging Education: Developing Emotional Literacy, Equity and Co-education.

Maidenhead: Open University Press

0 335 21579 3, p/b 0 335 21580 7 h/b

2006

Brian Matthews, of Goldsmiths College, University of London has produced a useful book for teachers covering equity and gender issues from the perspective of emotional literacy. The book is at the same time well documented with up to date research, and accessible to the non-specialist reader. It will therefore be a useful book to recommend to teacher education initial and in-service students. Part 1, The Need for Emotional Literacy, deals with educating the whole person, just relationships, definitions and power relations. Part moves on to communication between the sexes in the classroom; and Part 3 organisational issues such as single sex schools (he argues for coeducational schooling), broadening the emotional context (that schools should produce emotionally literate and controlled pupils happy in their relationships); and ways forward (implications for teachers and schools if pupils are to lead happy lives and transform their own communities. The book therefore is primarily about gender relationships in schooling.

The fields of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence (EI) have rapidly developed over the past decade, giving us a great deal of hype but less firm answers. Most of the problems stem from the use of the word 'intelligence', as measuring EI is hugely problematic and the claim that EI is more significant to a person's life and career than IQ. The industry of EI tests for employability has been much criticised. On the issues underlying this, Kevin Murphy *and colleagues* (2006) have recently brought together a helpful critique with fellow applied psychologists. Part of the problem is where EI overlaps with moral education, and personality, whether it is a thing in itself or a useful umbrella to bring together separate factors. Matthews prefers the term 'emotional literacy' as the equivalent UK terminology citing the psychoanalytical work of Claude Steiner (1997) whose definition is more reminiscent of emotional 'maturity' (another imprecise term!) with moral and social aspects of relationships embedded into it. The term 'literacy' has its main reference a completely different aspect of learning, so its use is potentially confusing - an ability to 'read' the emotions need not imply ethical actions. Emotional 'development' implies that there is a developmental process where children are less emotionally developed, and adults more emotionally developed. This is far too simplistic. People might be emotionally strong, or emotionally weak for a range of reasons. Personal experiences and traumas have a part to play; there may also be personality factors relevant to emotional coping - the 'big five' factors are emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience (Murphy, 2006: 72). Self esteem is used many times but its literature not consulted. Self esteem is a complex concept which can include narcissism, where a person has an unbalanced high sense of self importance and

worth. Chris Mruk's model of a double positive/negative continuum, *self worthwhileness* and *self competence* is useful. Mruk distinguishes between real and defensive self esteem: real self esteem is high in self worthwhileness and self competence; defensive is an ego defence covering up low self esteem through anger or arrogance). Different combinations of the two continua produce authentic, narcissistic, antisocial and depressed self esteem (Mruk, 1999:165).

It is clear that the emotions need to have a central place in education and opportunities given to discuss and act out different situations, scenarios and experiences. Long term and continued strategies are needed from infants to adults, and there are no magic solutions. The focus has to be on developing coping strategies (personal) and ethical relationships (moral) since changing pupils' personalities is certainly difficult and arguably inappropriate. Discussion of ethical relationships in co-educational (mixed sex) settings uses the language of social justice, which explicitly in the book covers gender, race and class and goes back ultimately to caring relationships and democratic organisation at all levels. A final comment is that the book is only about a fraction of its title *Engaging Education*. His section on 'engaging the emotions' sums this up: whereas the book is largely about engaging the emotions positively, the definition of 'Engaging' is more far reaching: "that pupils should be involved in their learning; be active and absorbed and not just passive recipients of a set curriculum. Additionally, they should feel engaged in the processes of education and have some input into creating their own agendas for learning" (p.2). Exploring the full impact of this statement across the curriculum really needs a different book.

References.

- Mruk, C (1999) *Self Esteem: Research, theory and practice* London, Free Association Books
- Murphy, K.R, Cleveland, J. N. , Fleishman, E. A., Furnham A. and Ashkanasy N. M. (2006) *A Critique Of Emotional Intelligence: What Are The Problems And How Can They Be Fixed?* Marwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.