

The Road to Emotional Development – Living Values: An Educational Program

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Self Understanding and Humanity

The road to human welfare and improvement is based on understanding the uniqueness of each individual. The ability to value others stems from the ability to value oneself. Understanding others sprouts from roots of understanding, acceptance and awareness of the beauty of oneself. This perception is what educators are seeking, to improve the quality of human beings. Through this realization educators are focusing on the whole child and helping children grow toward their full potential.

Different Views of Intelligence

Traditional Perspective

Decades ago, the exploration of different ways to access the ability of individuals resulted in the creation of intelligence tests. For over forty years IQ tests reigned as the monolithic intelligence view. Many psychologists noted that these tests did not begin to access many individuals' unique gifts and other abilities critical to success were not part of the equation. There is much more to a person that can be measured through an IQ test.

Multiple Intelligence

In his book "Frames of Mind", Howard Gardner celebrates diversity and human capabilities. He proposes that individuals are capable of at least seven forms of intellectual accomplishments: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal (Gardner, 1983). This view celebrates each individual's potential, qualities and strengths. While Gardner's theory sets a different perspective of human abilities in contrast to the former theory on intelligence, the dimension of intelligence he didn't explore thoroughly was that of emotions.

Dimension of Emotions in the Personality

Daniel Goleman addresses this issue in his book, "Emotional Intelligence". The chapter, "When Smart is Dumb", explores another dimension that contributes to success. This emotional dimension, although not emphasized by Gardner explicitly, is found within the personal intelligences, i.e. Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence

According to Goleman, Personal Intelligence, or as he calls it, Emotional Intelligence, is the ability to motivate oneself; control frustration, impulses and gratification; and regulate one's mood, keeping distress from swamping the ability to

think. These matters are essential to succeed in life and they define emotional Intelligence. (Goleman, 1995).

Emotions and the Brain

The impact of emotions on the human brain is scientifically recognized through the research done by Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist at the center of Neural Science at New York University. His research revealed how the architecture of the brain gives the Amygdale (the emotional sentinel) the privilege to hijack the thinking part of the brain (Neocortex). Le-Doux found a small bundle of neurons connecting the Amygdale directly to the Thalamus (the information receptor of the brain). “This smaller and shorter pathway, something like a neural back alley, allows the Amygdale to receive direct input form the senses then start to respond before they are fully registered by the Neocortex” (Goleman, 1995. P.20). Thus, there is always a possibility of times when emotions can overrule a person’s actions in a situation; times where self control is not dominant. Therefore, since emotions can over-rule logical and rational thinking there is a need for emotional learning and awareness.

Emotional Awareness

According to Goleman, emotional awareness is realized through:

- a) Knowing ones emotions
- b) Managing emotions
- c) Motivating oneself
- d) Recognizing emotions in others
- e) Handling relationships

This emotional awareness can be taught to students at school through emotional literacy programs.

Emotional Literacy Programs

Emotional literacy programs provide students with strategies for self-control, focusing and psychological stability. These strategies reinforce the academic ability of students in any educational setting. Students who go through a prevention program that builds emotional and social competencies develop their emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Such programs involve learning social skills, empathy, conflict resolution and guided imagery strategies.

Living Values: An Educational Program (LVEP)

Living Values: An Educational Program stands as a perfect example of an emotional literacy program that helps each individual realize and celebrate his or her uniqueness and qualities. The program focuses on helping students realize, discover, learn and become aware of their own values. It stimulates at its core the individual’s self awareness.

LVEP and Emotional Intelligence

Similar to the Emotional Intelligence theory that emphasizes the crucial role of emotions in addition to cognition and realizes the importance of the whole person, Living Values: An Educational emotional also highlights the emotional, cognitive and social dimensions. The program’s purpose is to provide guiding principles and tools

for the development of the whole person, recognizing that the individual is comprised of physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Tillman and Hsu, 2000).

LVEP and Gardner

In addition and similar to Gardner's view of the uniqueness of individuals, the program enhances the different capabilities of individuals when provided with values activities and a values-based atmosphere. The program's aims reflect the need and capacity of individuals to grow through learning about personal choices, personal development, and personal reflections through a values perspective. The program emphasizes the development of twelve universal values. These twelve values are explored through a variety of experiential activities and practical methodologies to help teachers and facilitators enable children and young adults to explore and develop.

Skills Provided by LVEP for Emotional and Social Development

The lessons offered by the program teach skills, techniques and strategies that have an impact on perceptions and social development. Some of the lessons involve self-development activities that help increase self-esteem, self-image and acceptance. Other lessons reinforce social skills and ability to deal with others through teaching conflict resolution and peer mediation techniques. As noted in an article on peer mediation "Even at the Elementary school level, peer mediation is a powerful, cost effective process that leaves participants feeling satisfied and respected while resolving conflict" (Angram & Beckwith, 1999, p. 23). Peer mediation is an effective tool for social development as it teaches students communication skills that can be used at school and home, to put feeling in words, to summarize and reflect on what they hear and most important of all to develop empathy (Angram & Beckwith, 1999).

In addition, some of the Living Values Activities include imagining and "quietly being exercises". These reinforce students' creativity, the ability to delay gratification and function on their own -- basic building blocks in emotional literacy programs. Based on research, guided relaxation exercises, imagery and taking time to reflect and focus are important skills that can improve attitude and coping with difficulty. According to Johns, "Studies have shown that a simple technique (for about one minute before doing a task, children close their eyes and think of something that makes them happy) generates significantly positive effects on children's social problem solving, performance and learning" (Johns, 2000, p. 124).

In particular, the techniques and skills provided by Living Values: An Education Program reinforce students' self-perception and confidence, which consequently increases their self-cognitive, physical and social competence. In general, through providing the tools and skills for self-awareness, positive attitude and social interaction the program helps students develop and increase their intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors and critical thinking skills, and consequently, their emotional intelligence.

Much More Offered by the Program

Living Values: An Educational Program paves the way to self-understanding and the uniqueness of each individual. In addition to providing youngsters with basic emotional, social and psychological skills the program helps them achieve a higher aim, that of self-awareness.

References

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