

Building Students Overall Success on Students' Emotional Learning

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Abstract: Children will take over social roles now played by adults in societies in the nearest future. There is a substantial gap between what is learned in the classroom and the actual life context of students' present and future world. Students' Emotional Learning (SEL) which some term "education of the whole child or total child education is founded on the positive youth development which advocates the needs of youth to be addressed by building backgrounds or settings that encourage outcomes like school achievement, mutually sympathetic relationships with adults and peers, problem solving, and civic engagement just to mention a few. Evidence has shown that students are not sufficiently groomed for the outside world, which includes work by the education system, not only in developing countries but also that of the developed countries. Research on programmes centred on social and emotional learning indicates that a systematic process for promoting students' social and emotional development is the mutual component among schools that report an increase in academic success, improved quality of relationships between educators and students, and a decrease in problem behaviour. School counsellors' among other educators are particularly trained to undertake guidance and counselling in schools due to their knowledge, awareness and skills that other school professionals may not have, they are thus called upon to help transform students through SEL competencies.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision Making, School Counsellors, Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Students' Emotional Learning, Students' Overall Success.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nobel Laureate, James Heckman, indicated that the utmost yields on education investments are "from nurturing children's non-cognitive skills, giving them social, emotional and behavioural benefits that lead to success later in life..." (Heckman & Masterov, 2004). Children will take over social roles now played by adults in societies and communities in the nearest future. There is a substantial gap between what is learned in the classroom and the actual life context of students' present or future world (Anamuah-Mensah & Towse, 1995; Stevenson, 1995). Most Part of the problem lies in the fact that educators focus most attention on the classroom knowledge and teaching as against teachings outside of the classroom which centres on the overall education of students.

Again, part also lies in the degree to which most curricula are examination-focussed, as a reason of which educators assume a highly instructive classroom method to finish the curriculum and meet the hopes of students, Parents and guardians, heads of institutions and other stakeholders who judge educational achievement purely by results. Attention has so been focused on 'learn hard, chew, poor, pass and forget' so much so that, students almost know next to nothing when they even pass examinations with flying colours. This article therefore calls for educational institutions to instruct educators most especially School counsellors (SCs) who are called upon to be leaders for systemic change through the delivery of a developmental school counselling programme (ASCA, 2008) to focus on student emotional learning alongside student academic achievement so as to nurture, guide and shape students up towards building student overall success.

2. DEFINING STUDENTS’ EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Students’ Emotional Learning (SEL) which others term “education of the whole child or total child education” may be defined as the manner in which individuals become socially and emotionally intelligent. Again, some generally define SEL as "the process through which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to achieve important life tasks" (Zins, Bloodworth, et al., 2007, p. 194). Programmes geared towards improving

SEL are planned to aid this process in systematic and all-inclusive manners within schools .The SEL undertaking emanates from scientific research on emotional intelligence (EI; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), which was later promoted by Daniel Goleman in1995. Emotional Intelligence has been defined as the mental abilities associated with processing and responding to emotions, including recognizing the expression of emotions in others, using emotions to enhance thinking, and regulating emotions to drive effective behaviours (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). According to Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade (2008) these abilities are likely to be associated with social competence, adaptation and academic success.

3. SCOPE OF STUDENTS’ EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a non-profit entity that advocates and provides leadership for high quality SEL programming and learning standards, classifies five core competencies related to SEL. They are as follows classified; self-awareness, self -management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. These competencies are illustrated below in Figure 1;



Figure 1. CASEL SEL Competencies

Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behaviour. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

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Self-management: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviours effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating one self, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

Social awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognize family, school and community resources and supports.

Relationship Skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively and seeking and offering help when needed.

Responsible decision making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behaviour and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others. (SEL Competencies taken from CASEL.org).

4. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The notion of SEL is founded on the positive youth development which advocates the needs of youth to be addressed by building backgrounds or settings that encourage outcomes like school achievement, mutually sympathetic relationships with adults and peers, problem solving, and civic engagement (Catalano et al., 2004; Greenberg et al., 2003).

Attempts to support positive youth development are different from those geared towards decreasing risk factors because they are geared towards improving skills, building assets, and promoting flexibility to achieving positive outcomes (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002). These Positive youth development interventions such as SEL programming characteristically use a skill-building, whole-child method which is based on upholding assets and not only on averting problems. Due to the fact that Schools are mainly locations which serve the educational and developmental needs of youth, they therefore are the persuasive targets for common and universal efforts to promote positive youth development.

Zigler and Bishop-Josef (2006) among other researchers are of the view that, to achieve the overall educational goal, school-based programming needs to meet two standards: (1) enhance the social and emotional assets and learning of students across the curriculum, and (2) improve the quality of the environments in which academic, social, and emotional learning occurs. The attempt therefore, for the education of the whole child to be successful will depend on the degree to which learning occurs in caring, supportive, safe, and empowering backgrounds and locations which is deeply ingrained in the ecological systems theory and self-determination theory.

Bronfenbrenner in 1979, founder of the Ecological systems theory states that, the backgrounds youth inhabit, for instance, school, shape their development characteristics of school backgrounds that are connected to positive youth development include opportunities for empowerment and skill building. Catalano and colleagues in 2004 also are of the view that the presence of supportive adults and peers help in shaping up students thus leading to their safety and orderliness.

The Self Determination theory posits that, youth are more likely to blossom when in environments that address their social and emotional needs like experiencing meaningful relationships, having confidence in their abilities, and feeling independent (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Students are more likely to thrive in classrooms that foster meaningful, caring, safe and empowering interactions (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997).

5. IMPORTANCE OF STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

SEL is not a new concept, many ancient cultures has it imbibed in their teachings and doctrines. This notwithstanding, accomplishing this balance that inspires children to study, attain and reach the apex of their prospects has been a perpetual difficulty as the world evolved and assumed a more dynamic state. Noah and Eckstein (1988) indicated that efforts to improve the school system may rather have made necessary things worse. This is solely because schools are practically interested and focusing more attention on students learning and passing examinations, coming out with a

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hundred percent record than concentrating on the overall student performance. New learning methods have emerged in schools to improve on learning, an example in Ghana is the UC maths which is a short form of teaching students to use the abacus in calculating maths mentally. In as much as this method and others are good, there should also be the conscious effort to inculcate SEL competencies in schools to help students acquire these competences. It is the responsibility of schools to provide enriching environments for young people to assimilate and contribute to society. Substantial empirical evidence shows that schools can be highly effective in promoting positive youth development even in the mist of other contextual variables such as low family socioeconomic status, economically depressed neighbourhoods (McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1997).

6. PREPARATION OF STUDENTS TOWARDS THE OUTSIDE WORD

Existing evidence have shown that students are not sufficiently groomed for the outside world, which includes work by the education system, not only in developing countries but also that of the developed countries. A lot of attempts and efforts have been made to improve this, with different levels of success (Noah and Eckstein, 1988; Anamuah-Mensah & Towse, 1995; Stevenson, 1995; Muskin, 1997; Tabron and Yang, 1997). Students developing from children to teenagers, cognitively, physically, psychologically, and socio-emotionally often times feel, think and act more on one than the other, sometimes on all, and other times interchanging constantly. These developmental stages are times where they experience many changes, including the biological changes, significant changes in relations with family and cohorts, social and educational changes. (Wigfield, Byrnes, & Eccles, in press; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002).

These developmental transitions can have substantial influence on numerous developmental outcomes, as well as academic achievement, self-concept development, and achievement motivation. For this reason, it is imperative that educators especially school counsellors have a definite understanding of the students and their needs before dealing with them. The transitioning from one school where they were the 'champions', seniors to another, where they become 'freshers' sometimes even labelled 'homos' leaves them susceptible than secure. School authorities especially educators and more importantly school counsellors are therefore to make conscious efforts to prepare students towards life after school and the world.

7. SCHOOL COUNSELLORS' ROLE IN STUDENTS EMOTIONAL LEARNING SUCCESS

Educators and students approach and attitude towards emotions impacts students' education in means that touch their cognitive, social and emotional development. Research on programmes centred on social and emotional learning (SEL) indicates that a systematic process for promoting students' social and emotional development is the mutual component among schools that report an increase in academic success, improved quality of relationships between educators and students, and a decrease in problem behaviour (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). SEL can be especially powerful when grounded in theory and empirical evidence, and when adult stakeholders in children's education are actively involved in cultivating and modelling their own social and emotional competencies (Brackett et al. 2009).

School counsellors' among other educators are distinctively trained to undertake guidance and counselling in schools due to their knowledge, awareness and skills that other school professionals may not have. It is for this reason that, school counsellors are called to help transform students through SEL competencies. Students hail from different backgrounds and emerge at schools and environments that are totally new to them. They have to learn about their environment and get used to that as well as get used to other students they meet. Most of these students especially those from less affluent homes, for instance remote villages, know next to nothing before leaving their elementary schools. Some of these students transit to secondary schools and are now beginning to learn about themselves and others. It is at this level that school counsellors are called to nurture and guide these students as they may be under their care.

Often more than not, students in the secondary schools leave their parents and are in boarding schools thus under the care of school authorities. They transition into tertiary schools where they are most likely to be on their own. The transition from one stage to the other, sometimes have a huge effect on them and leaves them unstable than stable. It is therefore imperative that school counsellors devote time and attention towards meeting students' emotional needs. Subsequently, what school counsellors actually do in schools for instance, schedules for student, administering tests may inhibit them

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from performing other duties for example, rapport building, consultation, leadership amongst others that can well address the needs of the students they expect to serve (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, SEL may be termed as the process through which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to achieve important life tasks. The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) which advocates and provides leadership for high quality SEL programming and learning standards, classifies five core competencies related to SEL. They are; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. It is imperative for school counsellors to focus on building relationships with students by employing the five SEL competences as possible in employing their interpersonal skills and training to form connections with the students. If this is achieved students will contribute more to the decisions (Responsible Decision Making) that affect them and to increase their role in regulating themselves (Relationship Skills & Self- Management). Students however do not experience the increasing empowerment (Self Awareness) and important participation they many want and need (Social Awareness). School counsellors per their training are in a good position to assist by instilling a suitable balance of youth participation and adult guidance as a way of upholding positive supervisory behaviour in Students.

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