

Teaching with empathy is a breath of fresh air.

Fiona Collins

Principal

Francis St. C.B.S.

Friday 20th November 2015

Outcomes of today

- How poverty affects the lives of children and how this impacts on teaching and school culture in Ireland today, using Francis St. C.B.S. as a case study
- Strategies and practical tools to create an 'emotionally healthy classroom and school'
- Look at the importance of teaching soft or non cognitive skills in addressing the social and emotional needs of children and in turn positively impacting academic needs.
- Using mindfulness as a tool to enhance children's social and emotional wellbeing
- **An understanding that unless children's social and emotional needs are met, no learning needs can.**

Poverty Statistics

- CSO figures in Jan 2015 show that the number of children in consistent poverty had risen by 12 % 1 in 8 are in consistent poverty now. The government made a commitment to end poverty by 2020- that still leaves 37,000 children in consistent poverty.
- Issue of homelessness- stats in July indicated that 1,185 children in 556 families were homeless in Dublin.
- Other stats of interest are – 4,500 young people leave school between primary and secondary, mainly from marginalised communities
- 99% of D 6 students go to 3rd level and 15 % in marginalised communities. Social exclusion is rife in education.
- 33% of primary school children in Disadvantaged communities leave school with literacy issues.

What poverty means...

- Inequalities in cognitive, social and emotional abilities due to socio economic status
- Children from low SES at a disadvantage before entering school due to basic needs such as food, health and a stimulating educational environment- often they are not ready for school
- Research has shown that a reading ability at age 7 is related to school attendance and staying on rate at 16
- Academic achievement at 8 years influences earnings at age 36
- Conduct disorders at age 10 predict male adult unemployment and physical aggression in childhood is predictive of late aggression (Doyle and Timmins, 2007)

Poverty means.....

- Language skills can be impacted, often difficulties arise in understanding abstract, decontextualized language of school (Nelson, 2010)
- Poor social, cultural and emotional capital
- Family structure and role models
- Issue of homelessness
- Crime, violence, substance abuse and anti social behaviour
- Prevalence of mental health issues both with children and parents
- Issues surrounding anxiety and stress
- Prevalence of behaviour disorders and learning difficulties

Question to consider

- What is the actual impact of poverty in our classrooms?
- In our schools?
- What will it mean for you?

The day to day realities

- Poor hygiene, clothing and lack of school equipment
- Significant focus on literacy and numeracy
- Poor parental involvement
- Days of week, seasons etc., address
- Classroom and behaviour management strategies/positive reinforcement
- Influence of peers
- Gangs, violence- anti social behaviour/aggression
- Higher incidences of stress and anxiety- anxiety disorders, separation anxiety disorder, panic and selective mutism
- Higher incidences of ADHD and CD
- Fewer protective factors

Protective Factors

- Personal:

- Physical health, temperament, beliefs about locus of self control and competence. Self awareness, self motivation and regulation, mood management, relationships and empathy

Family Factors:

Secure attachments, fewer family disruptions, connected family interaction patterns.

Stress

- Poverty and stress
- Psychological symptoms of stress
 - Feeling angry, impatient, irritable, poor concentration, feeling overwhelmed and anxious
- Emotionally healthy classrooms and schools avoid stress and give strategies to children to deal with stress
- Yoga and mindfulness are great tools

What is an emotionally healthy classroom and school?

- What elements are required in your classroom to promote positive mental health?
- What elements are required in a school to promote positive mental health?

A healthy classroom

- Identifies vulnerable students and groups
- Uses positive reinforcement strategies to manage behaviour
- Understands the link between mental health and educational attainment
- Teachers model pro social behaviour
- Teaches soft skills or non cognitive skills. Non cognitive skills are closely associated with school engagement and academic outcomes (Gutman, 2013)
- Teaches emotional literacy
- Teaches resilience and builds character
- Has a curriculum based on social and emotional learning to address mental health issues and stress
- Gives children opportunity for leadership and participation in school life
- Teaches empathy, encourages children to make good choices
- Teaches skills of conflict resolution and restorative practice

A healthy classroom is a happy one..



A healthy School

- Pro Kindness campaigns- 'Gratitude Week', 'Compliment Day', 'Mental Health Month', 'Positive Health Week'
- Restorative Practices and problem and solution approaches when dealing with behaviour
- Encourages the teaching of non cognitive skills
- Has plenty of clubs, committees, teams and councils
- Assemblies promoting positive behaviour
- Encourages positive relationships between children, teachers, parents and members of the community
- Bullying policies
- Develops a curriculum based on school context and culture to address mental health issues and behaviour issues of school body

Emotional Literacy, positive self talk and self control

- Teaching the language of emotions-feeling words
- Validating emotions
- Feelings notice board in classroom
- Teaching emotional regulation and self regulation-Stanford Marshmallow test
- Positive self talk and strategies
- Teaching children how to exercise self control

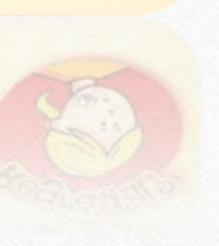
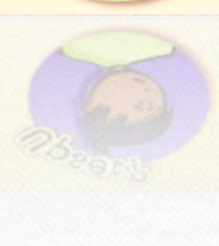
Count backwards from
20 or 100

Tell yourself
you can handle
this...

“ I can calm down
I can start again
I can do it “

Tell yourself
STOP

How do you feel today?



Emotional Resilience, character building and self efficacy

- Rutter (1985) identifies 3 components of emotional resilience
 - A sense of self esteem and self confidence
 - A belief in ones own self –efficacy and ability to deal with change and adaptation (inner locus of control)
 - A repertoire of problem solving approaches as opposed to emotionally responsive approaches

Promoting Resilience in Children

- A resilient young person is one who is able to say: HAC (Cooper, 2000; Grotberg 1997)
- I Have (i.e. emotional resilience)- I have people who love me and people to help me
- I Am (i.e. cognitive resilience) – I am a likeable person and respectful of myself and others
- I Can (i.e. behavioural resilience) I can find ways to solve problems and control myself

Components of wellness curriculum

- Teaches:
- Self awareness
- Self management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision making (clubs, committees and councils)

Brainstorm

- What is empathy?
- What is the difference between empathy and sympathy?
- How important is empathy as a teacher?

Empathy

- Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another
- Difference between empathy and sympathy- empathy fuels connection and sympathy fuels disconnection. Empathy feeling with someone, sympathy feeling for someone.
- Empathy involves perspective taking, staying out of judgement, recognising emotion of others- very important in social inclusion topics
- Important to teach children about empathy especially when dealing with behaviour and issues around racism, migrants etc..
- Importance of empathy in teachers- agents of change recognising that norms and values of a vulnerable group may not be your own.
- Building positive relationships is the key

How can empathy be encouraged?

- Empathy based methodology programme in your classroom and school
- Playground friends and peer mediation
- Conflict resolution programmes
- Restorative practices
- Cards:
 - What happened?
 - What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
 - What can we do to make things better?
 - How can we make sure it doesn't happen again

Mindfulness

- Excellent tool to reduce stress and the socio-emotional difficulties associated with it
- Promotes emotional resilience
- Enhances well being, reduces behavioural issues and encourages emotional self regulation
- Studies show it increases attention, builds empathy, increases self control, reduces stress and classroom participation
- Important to ensure integrity is maintained
- Can be done as lessons, individually.
- Can be done every day, once a week or as a whole school exercise
- Examples are: PAWS B, Bright Sparks, The Sanctuary, Summer Courses



“JUST
BREATHE...”

Conclusion

- Teachers are important agents of change in addressing educational inequalities
- Poverty and all that is associated with it can impact greatly on lives of young people and your classrooms and schools
- An emotionally healthy classroom and school that teaches emotional literacy and empathy and cultivates an environment that promotes resilience, conflict resolution can greatly counteract issues caused by poverty
- No academic needs can be met unless social and emotional needs are attended to