Teaching with empathy is a breath of fresh air.

Fiona Collins
Principal
Francis St. C.B.S.
Outomes 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 2/3s 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
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 one's 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 Santuary, 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 teachers 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