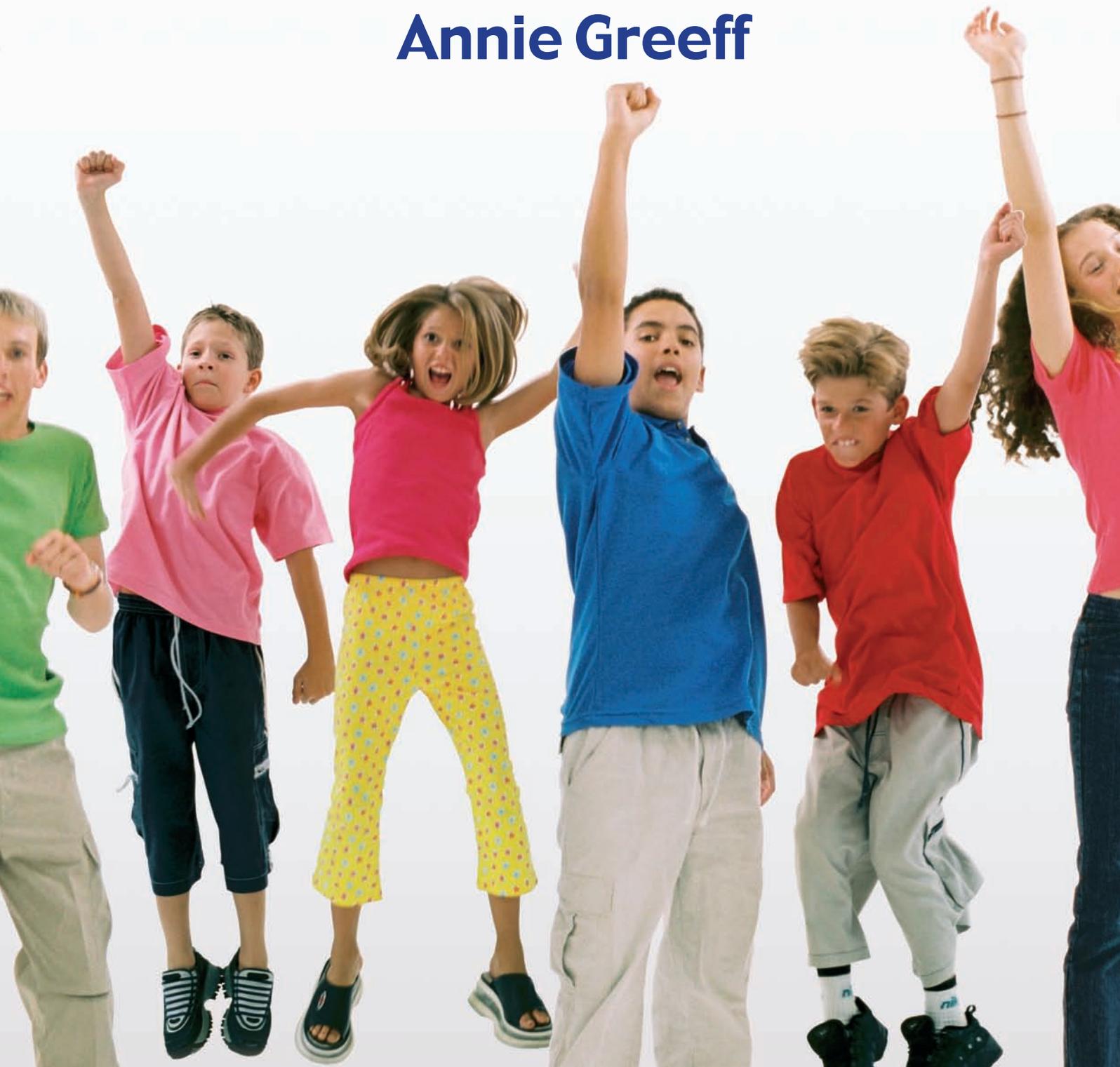


Social Skills for Effective Learning

Annie Greeff



The Resilience Series

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Introduction

Developing social competencies

Today, many families live in neighbourhoods where they are afraid to let children play outside. The result is that children spend hours watching videos or TV, sending text messages or playing with a computer. Children and their parents spend less time talking to each other or visiting relatives and neighbours. Previously, these interactions were the opportunities to learn emotional skills. Now we have to find alternative methods of teaching such skills to children. The school is probably a good place to start this process, and this means that teachers will have to fulfil the roles of life coaches. What is being measured most of the time is the academic part of the curriculum, therefore the attention to cognitive or thinking skills is at the expense of emotional skills. With the strong emphasis on academic success, it requires a definite change in mindset to address emotional skills.

Paul Hawken (quoted in Crane, 2000) said:

We lead by being human. We do not lead by being corporate, by being professional or by being institutional.

In modern leadership, the leader is required to role model lifelong learning and continuous personal growth. Modern leadership implies a certain level of vulnerability, which is a result of connecting with others on a more personal level, and admitting one's own mistakes and weaknesses. The extent to which we share information about ourselves depends on the level of trust in our relationship, and requires good judgement and timing.

When working with children through the use of this book, it may be the only time during a whole day or even week that some individuals will receive focused attention. Whatever the reasons may be, many families do not have regular, constructive, high-quality family interaction. Where else could young people learn or reinforce emotional competencies, if it does not happen at home?

During the work sessions on resilience, children will

be listened to and have the opportunity to express their concerns and emotions in a safe environment. When young people are more in touch and in control of their emotions, and acknowledge other people's emotions, teachers may actually reap the benefits in their classrooms! Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman (1982) said:

The simple act of paying positive attention to people has a great deal to do with productivity.

A caring relationship with a teacher gives children the motivation for wanting to succeed.

By being a caring person, the teacher acts as a role model in forming caring relationships. Most parents were not trained in emotional competencies, and traditional teacher training did not include the refinement of such skills either. However, a favourite teacher is not just an instructor for academic skills but also a confidant and becomes an inspiring role model for caring relationships.

Although it would be unreasonable to expect teachers who are already carrying a heavy work burden to also become counsellors and confidants, their influence on children's lives is indisputable. However, working with children with the purpose of developing personal and social skills will spark personal growth in both directions.

Real education consists of drawing the best out of yourself.

Mahatma Gandhi

Teachers as emotional caretakers

Ron Edmonds (1986), the so-called grandfather of school effectiveness research, wrote:

A school can create a coherent environment so potent that for at least six hours a day it can override almost everything else in the lives of children.

INTRODUCTION

Every child needs encouragement, acknowledgement and acceptance. It is amazing how many successful employees can identify at least one supportive or inspiring person who played a significant role in their personal or career development. So, too, will most people remember a special teacher who paid attention, conveyed high expectations and recognized inputs and successes.

As an investor in people, you have the power to build the self-esteem of a child. Teachers do not always get the public recognition for their work with children, and are often on the receiving end when it comes to criticism. However, by being personally involved in the development of a young person, you earn a place in the heart and life of a human being.

In leadership models, parenting and teaching, it is general knowledge that role modelling is the most effective way of changing people. Some educationalists believed that role modelling may not be the best way to teach – it may be the only way to teach! The actions of a role model are very powerful in bringing about a desired behaviour because actions do speak louder than words. However, the ideal role model is not a perfect being. Modern leadership is not synonymous with perfection – leaders can make mistakes and show their emotions. When they admit mistakes, they become more ‘human’ and people can associate with them. Young people can associate with less than perfect leaders. More important than anything else is for young people to know that they are loved and that somebody is there for them. Love in this context means unconditional acceptance of the person. You may not always agree with the actions and behaviours of children, but you can accept them

as people. The most beloved modern leaders seem to be vulnerable and less than perfect. It is their warmth and caring nature that gives them a place in people’s hearts.

When you work through this resource book, you will possibly embark on your own personal development journey as you rethink some of your own beliefs, values and actions. In this process of personal growth, you will demonstrate the healthy habits of lifelong learning and flexible thinking.

While the news emphasizes the darker side of life – corruption, murder, HIV Aids pandemic, the gap in the ozone layer, war, unrest, the list goes on – it creates a frame of reference in the minds of children. Different generations have different frames of reference, and therefore respond differently to challenges. How do you balance hope and a positive outlook on the future with a bleak reality? How do you inspire young people to believe in the future when their own personal realities may be anything but bright?

Your biggest challenge is possibly to start believing in a bright future yourself. So, before you embark on this personal journey with children, ask yourself:

- What do I believe about myself?
- What do I believe about children?
- What do I believe about the future?

Your beliefs create your reality. Your beliefs become your self-fulfilling prophesy. And your beliefs about children determine where you take them during this journey.

Guidelines: Activity Sheet 4

Noticing different emotions

Learning points

Being aware of emotions is a graded competency. Some people are highly sensitive to other people's feelings, they become too involved and almost take over the other person's emotions. Other people are insensitive, not feeling or caring at all. Both extremes are unhealthy. When you have empathy, you will be able to acknowledge and understand other people's emotions, while being objective enough to analyse the situation rationally or 'from a distance' at the same time. In this way you can evaluate circumstances accurately and form a balanced opinion.

Comments

- 1 Ask the children to rate themselves on the scale shown on Activity Sheet 4 based on how they think they react to other's feelings.
- 2 Talk about the story of Sarah who did not discuss her observations, but was deeply aware of other people and their preferences. It is worth noting that usually people who are very talkative are not so aware of other's feelings.

Timing

5 minutes introduction and Sarah's story

2 minutes self-rating

3 minutes concluding

4 Noticing different emotions

On your own

Read the text below and then decide what number you are on the empathy scale.



Cold fish

- Do not understand emotions
- Do not feel guilty when doing something wrong
- Do not work well with others
- Fight with others
- Hurt others
- Bully
- Tell lies



Warm teddy bear

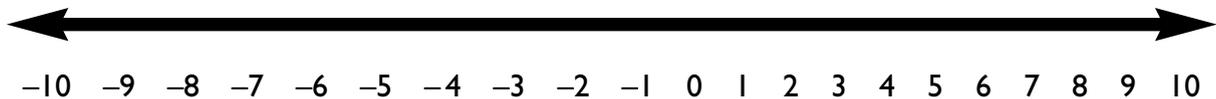
- Comfortable with emotions
- Love others
- Enjoy working with others
- Make people feel good
- Repair friendships
- Try to be kind
- Want others to be happy



Soppy puppy

- Take over other people's problems
- Feel guilty when others suffer
- Talk about other people's problems all the time
- Want to be liked by everybody
- Cannot say no

Empathy scale



Large group

This is a story about Sarah, a quiet little girl in a playgroup. She often used to sit on her own, watching the others play. The teachers and her parents were a bit worried that she might have emotional problems.

Then one day, one of the teachers did an experiment. She asked each child in the class to explain to the rest of the class who played with whom, what the favourite games of the different groups of children were, and which toys they preferred to play with.

When it was Sarah's turn, everybody had a big surprise! She knew better than anybody else in the class what everybody else did or enjoyed the most.

Reflection

Where on the scale would you place Sarah?

Guidelines: Activity Sheet 10

Recovering from emotional setbacks

Learning points

Asking for help is an important aspect of being a resilient learner. If you are too shy or too proud to ask for help, you slow down your own progress. This does not imply a lack of effort on your side. Taking full responsibility for your life takes effort, but also requires the wisdom to know that we are here to make a difference to other people's lives while allowing them to make a difference to ours.

Comments

- 1 Discuss the steps one by one, expanding on each.
- 2 At the end, ask the children to share their insights.

Tip

Have a tactful discussion about events that can happen to people that could be devastating and harmful, and how help from others is needed. There are stories about people who survived horrible circumstances because there was someone there to help. Afterwards, even strong survivors need to work through the emotional aspects of trauma in order to heal completely and live normal lives.

Timing

5 minutes introduction

10 minutes general discussion, going through the steps

10 minutes sharing of stories and their learning points

5 minutes concluding

10 Recovering from emotional setbacks

👤👤👤 Large group discussion

Resilient people know when to ask for help and they find out to whom they could go. When something happens to you that makes you really sad, angry or upset, it may help to talk to a person that you can trust. Once you have talked to this person, you can keep on working through difficulties on your own as well. The following steps may help you recover from difficulties.

- 1 Admit to yourself that you have a problem, and think of people that you trust and that you feel comfortable to talk to.
- 2 Talk to a person who will understand and explain what happened and how you felt. Don't try and tell everything at once. Use a few talks to work through the experience bit by bit.
- 3 If you feel guilty, angry and cheated, admit that to yourself. Allow yourself to really feel the emotions – if you deny the emotions, they won't go away. They simply stay there, until they have a chance to surface again. Cry, shout into a pillow, beat your fists into a pillow or take a walk, and let go of the feelings.
- 4 Give up feeling like a loser. Bad things that happen to you do not make you bad. Remind yourself of your good points.
- 5 Forgive the person or persons who made you suffer.
- 6 Learn useful lessons from the experience. Think what you will do differently in future.
- 7 Find a short answer that you will use when people ask you about this difficulty.
- 8 Move on with your life, and use the wisdom you have gained from working through this problem.

Adapted from Al Siebert (1996)



Guidelines: Activity Sheet 7

Talk tactfully

Learning points

This activity is an application of feedback skills and the use of WIN-messages. The principle is that the talker owns the message. It is not blaming, attacking or complaining, but rather a description of the talker's experience of the event.

Comments

- 1 The children work in pairs and formulate answers.
- 2 They give feedback to the larger group.

Tip

Children are still in the process of developing emotional skills, and may find this activity difficult. It may be useful to begin with several general examples. Be sensitive not to refer to 'wrong' or 'right' answers, but instead assist in refining skills. This is not an easy skill to master.

Timing

Depending on the size of the group, it may take up to a minute per participating pair.

7 Talk tactfully

Share in pairs

Work in pairs and for each of the examples below, write one of your own. Be prepared to read your examples to the larger group and take care not to use examples that may hurt or embarrass others.

- 1 Show that you understand the other person's feelings. You might not agree, but when you understand and accept the other person, you make it easier for the other person to relax and talk.

Example:

'I can understand that you are upset. If I were in your position, I might feel the same.'

- 2 Accept it when the other person does not feel comfortable to talk about the problem. Later on, the person might feel like sharing information.

Example:

'I understand that some things are private. You do not need to discuss that now.'

- 3 Use 'I' messages. Describe actions, feelings and effects, not the person.

Example:

'When you did not return my call, I thought that you were angry at me.'

Not:

'You never phone back.'

Social Skills for Effective Learning will enable you to promote self-managed, resilient learning in your classroom. This practical workbook contains a series of easy to follow, well designed modules with full teacher's notes and instructions. The modules include: Interpersonal and Adaptive Skills; Developing Empathy; Finding Solutions; Managing Conflict; and Diversity. Each module comprises an introduction, guidelines for the teacher and photocopyable worksheets. Learning points are included with the worksheets to remind students of the main focus of the exercises and to assist in understanding what they are aiming to achieve.

“... the core skills that Greeff details are essential for today's young people to be successful in tomorrow's world. This resource will give confidence to school staff who wish to be an effective life coach in enabling young people to learn to cope with the inevitable challenges they will face.”

Rob Long, Chartered Psychologist

“The thinking behind this work is excellent and the range of exercises is fascinating and creative. A very useful resource to stimulate classroom or youth work on this important topic.”

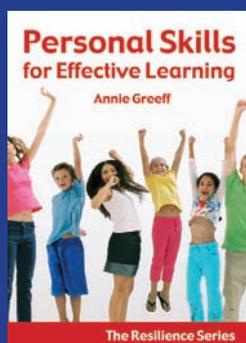
**Keith V. Trickey, Senior Lecturer, School of Business Information,
Liverpool John Moores University**

“The subject matter is spot on—it's exactly what schools up and down the country are looking for at the moment and the way the author has set out the progression of the materials works really well.”

Bruce Potts, Education Consultant, Trainer and Author

“... contains numerous useful activities for teachers to adapt to the age of children they teach. The book will be a valuable resource for educators researching the field of emotional intelligence.”

Dr Eva Hoffman, Author, Founder and Director of Inspired Learning



Also available:

Personal Skills for Effective Learning - Focuses on promoting self-esteem and emotional development. This book includes sections on Resilience; Identity; Emotions; My World; Free to be Me; and My Time.

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