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ENCOURAGING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Social and emotional learning is of vital importance in the holistic development of students, contributing to their academic success, personal well-being, and future success in life. In the English language classroom, teachers have a unique opportunity to foster social and emotional skills alongside language proficiency, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

The notion of social and emotional learning is defined as «the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions» [2]. These skills are not only essential for academic success but also for personal and social development.

One of the well-known social and emotional learning frameworks is presented by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [1]. It identifies five types of competencies which support the message that enhancing children's social, behavioural, and emotional skills is important to become successful in school, their societies, and in life. The first type is the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behaviour. The second competency is self-management, i.e. the ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in different situations, effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. Next, social-awareness presupposes the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Then, relationship skills are the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. Finally, responsible decision-making is the ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms [3, p. 188].

In the English language classroom, social and emotional learning can enhance students' language learning experiences by promoting meaningful communication, collaboration, and cultural understanding. By developing this type of skills, students can improve their ability to express themselves effectively, resolve conflicts peacefully, and engage in respectful and inclusive interactions with others.

The way learners and teachers feel in the classroom can either hinder or facilitate the learning journey [4]. For instance, exam stress can cause an inability to perform. Developing skills to proactively manage stress can enable a learner to succeed.

For teachers, dealing with emotional demands is extremely important. Having understanding and developing these competencies is essential if they want to model and teach appropriate social and emotional skills. Teachers with social and emotional competencies are better able to create positive relationships in the classroom, and that is the foundation for any learning to happen. Moreover, such teachers experience less burnout and cope better with challenging behaviours in the classroom. Besides, being able

to show empathy improves teachers' sense of wellbeing in both their professional and personal lives.

To encourage social and emotional learning in the English language classroom, a teacher can use the following strategies:

1. Creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment. A teacher should establish a safe and supportive classroom where students feel valued, respected, and accepted encouraging positive interactions and celebrating diversity.

2. Teaching social and emotional learning skills explicitly. These skills must be integrated into the curriculum by teaching specific skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Role-playing, group discussions, and reflective activities can be helpful to reinforce these skills.

3. Fostering empathy and understanding. A teacher should encourage students to consider different perspectives and experiences through literature, storytelling, and real-life examples, promote empathy and understanding towards others' feelings and experiences.

4. Encouraging collaboration and communication. The emphasis must be on projects, group discussions, and cooperative learning activities which provide effective communication and active listening skills.

5. Emphasizing emotional regulation. Students should be taught strategies for managing their emotions, such as deep breathing, mindfulness, and positive self-talk. They learn to recognize and express their feelings in a constructive manner.

Integrating social and emotional learning into the English language classroom is essential for promoting students' overall well-being and academic success. By fostering social and emotional skills alongside language proficiency, teachers can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students can thrive personally, socially, and academically. Through intentional social and emotional learning instruction and practice, students can develop the skills they need to face life's challenges, build positive relationships, and contribute positively to society.

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