



Enhancing Children's Emotional Literacy

In-Class Activity

A series of higher education activities based on the CSEFEL Preschool Modules. These activities are designed to be embedded in coursework and include ideas for in-class activities and assignments.

Rationale

Emotional literacy is the ability to identify, understand, and express emotions in a healthy way. Children who do not learn to use emotional language have a hard time labeling and understanding their own feelings as well as accurately identifying how others feel.

Objectives

1. Students will define emotional literacy.
2. Students will describe the characteristics of young children who have a strong emotional literacy.
3. Students will describe the importance of teaching both positive and negative feeling words.

Type of Activity

Individual and large group discussion

Time Allotment

20 minutes, although more time may be needed to allow for sharing and discussion.

Materials Needed

1. Flip chart paper
2. Markers

Introduction to Topic and Transition to In-Class Activity

1. Define emotional literacy (the ability to identify, understand, and express emotions in a healthy way).
2. Explain the importance of teaching children emotional literacy and discuss the characteristics of children who have a strong foundation using emotional language and those who do not.

Sequence for In-Class Activity

1. Have students individually list 10 - 15 feeling words they would want to teach preschoolers.
2. Put students in small groups and have them share their lists of feeling words. They should write the comprehensive list on flip chart paper.
3. Have students count the number of positive and negative feeling words on their list. Stress the importance of teaching both positive and negative words.

Discuss as a large group how similar or different the words lists were that each group developed.

4. Explain the importance of teaching feeling words that go beyond happy, sad, and mad.
5. Explain to students that there are several ways to enhance children's emotional literacy (see <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#teaching-skills>):
 - i. Direct teaching: involves planning specific activities and opportunities for children to increase their emotional literacy as well as to start to discriminate what different facial expressions and emotions might look like.
 - ii. Indirect teaching: provide emotional labels when children experience various affective states (i.e., "You're happy." "He looks like he's frustrated.").
 - iii. Use songs and games: share examples of songs ("If you're happy and you know it...").
 - iv. Play "How would you feel?": have children role play typical situations that happen when they are together.
 - v. Checking In: children can "check in" each morning by putting their name by a feeling face picture. Children should be encouraged to change feeling faces throughout the day, as their emotions change.
 - vi. Use a feeling dice and a feeling wheel to teach emotional literacy.
6. Ask students to discuss different ways they have observed early childhood professionals and family members enhancing emotional literacy to preschoolers. Ask students to describe how they would teach emotional literacy to preschoolers.

Closing

Make the point that enhancing children's emotional literacy helps build a strong foundation in emotional language use and increases children's ability to label and understand their own feelings as well as to accurately identify how others feel. Children who have a strong emotional literacy tolerate frustration better, engage in less destructive behavior, are less lonely, and have greater academic success.

(continued)

Adaptations & Considerations



Potential issues and concerns for the instructor to consider

- Some students might state they would not want to teach children negative words. Discuss the importance of children knowing how to express when they feel positive as well as when they feel negative emotions. Talk about the fact that if children are unable to say that they are frustrated, embarrassed, angry etc. they may use negative behaviors such as hitting, biting, and throwing toys to express these emotions instead.

Adaptations

- Some students may not directly work with children but rather work with families or other professionals (e.g., administrators, social workers, technical assistance providers, etc.). In this situation, ask them to reflect on the families with whom they work, and to consider how family members feel about teaching their children emotional literacy. You can also ask students to consider the families' cultural backgrounds and to incorporate familiar vocabulary commonly used in these households and in the community. They can also consider classrooms they have visited, or work with a partner who is currently working in an early childhood classroom.
- You can also ask students who are administrators to make a plan for how they would support their staff in teaching emotional literacy to young children.

Online Class Considerations

In a discussion forum:

- Ask students to post feeling words they would want to teach preschoolers.
- Have students observe for one hour in an early childhood setting and write down every feeling word they heard adults and children say. Highlight any particular instances of adults TEACHING feeling words.
- Ask students to post suggestions on how they would go about teaching emotional literacy to children.

Practicum Seminar Considerations

- Ask students to reflect on how emotional literacy is taught in their practicum sites. Have them observe for one hour and write down every feeling word they hear the adults in the classroom use and every feeling word they hear children say. Have students highlight instances of adults TEACHING feeling words to the children.
- Ask students to share how they would incorporate teaching emotional literacy in their classrooms.

Resources and Readings

1. Enhancing Emotional Vocabulary in Young Children by G. E. Joseph & P. S. Strain.
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module2/handout6.pdf>
2. What Works Briefs #21: Fostering Emotional Literacy in Young Children: Labeling Emotions by G. Joseph, P. Strain, & M. M. Ostrosky <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb21.pdf>
3. Using Books to Support Social Emotional Development
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module2/handout4.pdf>