

## NURTURING THE HEART: THE ROLE OF EMPATHY IN CLASSROOMS

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Bullying, whether online or cyber, is one of the problems plaguing our education. The acts of bullying affect not only the students but also the whole learning community. Bullying stems from various reasons but acknowledging the lack of empathy is one of those. Empathy might be a cliché word but it is essential in creating a positive and nurturing environment where students can learn to respect each other.

Because of Covid-19, some of the students and teachers do not have the opportunity to meet physically. Thus, it becomes a challenge for educators to instill empathy among the students. Empathy is defined as the ability to emotionally understand what other individuals feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine one's self in their place. Empathy is essential because it is what it means to be human. It is the foundation for acting morally, creating relationships of various kinds, propagation of love, and for professional growth and success. It is also an antidote against all forms of hate.

The Harvard Graduate School of Education, one of the leading education schools in the world, enumerated five guideposts that educators and parents can follow to cultivate empathy.

First, we should empathize with the learners and model empathy for others. Empathizing with them connotes many forms such as turning into their physical and emotional needs, understanding and respecting their individualities, taking genuine

interests in their lives, and guiding them towards experiences that show an understanding of the kind of individuals they are and the things that they enjoy.

Second, we should make caring for other people a priority and set high ethical expectations. Parents and teachers must explicitly and directly tell children that caring about others is a topmost priority. We must help our children understand that the world does not revolve around them and that we live in a world where interdependence is a way of survival.

Third, we must provide opportunities for children to practice empathy. Empathy is a trait that needs to be nurtured throughout their lives. Like any other skill, it requires practice and guidance, especially from the adult and teachers. Empathy can be achieved through family meetings where members can openly discuss emotions and views. We can also guide them by encouraging empathy for peers. It can be helpful to ask them about their classmates and friends, who are they, what activities they spend with, and other experiences they had.

Next, we can expand our children's circle of concern. This means 'zooming in and out where children learn to tune in carefully to others but also take in multiple perspectives from other people. We can use newspaper or TV stories to initiate dialogues with children about other people's struggles and challenges, or simply show the different experiences of children from other places and social backgrounds.

Lastly, it is equally relevant to help children develop self-control and manage feelings effectively. Oftentimes, some of them find it difficult to express their feelings. As such, it might be helpful to help them identify their feelings. Most importantly, in a world that is never without problems, let us help them how to resolve conflicts. A practice with learners on how to resolve conflicts is of great help. We can present conflicts to them or role-play various ways of responding. The thing we need to do is try to achieve mutual

understanding where both persons listen and paraphrase each other's feelings until they both stand on the same ground.

It is important to note that there are also classroom practices and activities a teacher can employ to instill empathy among learners. Teachers can ask students to role-play a scene that is aimed at teaching the importance of empathy. No matter what the educational set up is, the value of empathy should not be removed. Without this trait, our students will have big brains but zero souls.

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