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EMOTIONS, EXPRESSIONS AND ENGLISH TEACHER

1. REVATHY RAVICHANDRAN & 2. N. RAJASEKHARAN NAIR

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Authors' Profile

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Abstract

In this era of globalization, English language, which is the language spoken in the world of power and business, is the principle language of communication in any workplace. Documents are written, sent and preserved in English. It is the accepted language that is spoken over the phone across the professional world and the language that is used to express emotions in any workplace. Thus, it befits the English teacher in any institution to coach students with not only the requisite communication skills but also enhance their emotional intelligence. The paper aims to show how an English facilitator can improve the learners' emotions and expressions using excerpts from literary texts.

(Key words: Globalization, communication, skills, emotional intelligence, expressions, workplace, English literature)



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Introduction

Every college in India advertises of excellent placement record and competes with other colleges to provide opportunities for its students to be placed in companies - be it IT or the respective core companies, depending on the student's branch of study. To make this possible most of the colleges in India arrange for and provide training to students to equip them with employability skills.

According to the National Employability Report ((June, 2013) by Aspiring Minds, 47% of graduates in India are not employable for any industry role. The survey included 60,000 graduates from colleges across India. The report says that a maximum of 35.95% of graduates are employable in clerical roles and less that 3% for corporate communication and accounting roles. (http://www.aspiringminds.in/press_doc)

These people are failures in their workplace as they are not trained in skills and knowledge necessary for effective participation in the workforce - communication, self-management of emotions, problem solving, decision making, team work and relationship management. It is saddening that not much effort is made in higher education institutions to equip students with emotional intelligence which is of utmost importance in any workplace in order to move up the corporate ladder and achieve career success.

Literature to Build Personal and Social Competence

It is saddening that in today's competitive world, many seem to have forgotten that to coach young learners with emotional intelligence and the learners need to be exposed to materials that bear resemblance to social contexts. What best can serve this purpose, but literature? Literary pieces depict society in all its shades and tints, paints pictures with words; as varied as it is authentic and natural - short stories, poetry, dramas, travelogues, novels, biographies, autobiographies and the like - expose learners to the real world that exists outside the classrooms. Using any of these, an English language facilitator can transform the classrooms to a stage where learners may be exposed to emotions and expressions.



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Exposure to literature also helps in cultural enrichment of the learners as literary texts expose learners to many cultures and present a colourful setting in which characters from many social and regional backgrounds come together and interact. It shows the way the characters see the world outside, their thoughts, feelings, customs and traditions. It also shows different ways of connecting ideas, improving the learners' communicative and cultural competence through its authentic richness and naturalness.

One of the great strength of literature is its suggestive power. It makes readers and listeners think beyond the literal meanings of words. Being highly suggestive and subtle, literature conveys different meanings to different people. It is rare for two readers to react identically to any given text. To a facilitator, this has two advantages. One, it helps generate discussions and paves way for an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion since each person's perception would be different, and another it would sharpen the learner's analytical skills. With the innumerable interpretations and the possibility of many layers of meanings, it can also be used to train learners to be open to ideas, be acceptable and be flexible.

Literature and Learners

While poems develop sensitivity, greater analytical ability and evoke feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind; short fiction, which 'mirrors and illuminates human lives' (Sage 1987:43); enlarges worldviews about different cultures and different groups of people. It also promotes critical thinking, helps students to go beyond the surface meaning, dive into underlying meanings and provides learners with a chance to use their creativity when asked to complete the story with a different end. Novels too provide all the educational benefits that short stories provide – be it real-life exposure, analytical skills, problem solving skills, decision making skills, cultural enrichment and the like. Autobiographies, biographies and speeches of famous personalities can help the facilitators in engaging the learners in a discussion about the lives, struggles, qualities, etc. of those personalities and assist in building the learners' personal competence and intrapersonal skills. Dramas, with characters and dialogue, bring life before the eyes of the learners. With varied characters and emotions, they are ideal to coach learners with emotions and expressions – in other words personal and social competence or intra personal and interpersonal skills.



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Short Stories

Brice (2004) points out how storytelling 'is a successful strategy to increase pragmatic oral skills, the ability to use language in specific contexts for specific purposes, leading to greater ability to write'. According to Groce (2004), stories help to 'improve critical reading skills in content areas'; to Mallan (1991), they 'develop the imagination which in turn builds on problem solving competencies. As children engage in storytelling they learn to listen, to participate in and understand narrative discourse and create a path to more sophisticated use of language, reading and writing in their everyday lives. LoCicero et al, (1999), feel that 'when children's stories are turned into mathematical word problems; it strengthens their ability to think creatively about mathematic operations while developing language skills'.

Jalongo (2004) says 'On the emotional front, 'stories and storytelling help to develop positive character traits in children by promoting a sense of shared experiences and emotions related to the characters and challenges dealt with in the stories'. LoCicero et al, (1999), also write that stories bring 'cultural awareness into the classroom' and according to Geist (2003) stories help in resolving 'traumatic experiences and the resultant anxiety'. (<http://ccb.lis.illinois.edu/>)

As stories teach us about life, about the people around us, storytelling is an exclusive way for students to develop empathy, appreciation, admiration and deference for other cultures; and can promote a progressive and affirmative attitude to people from different races, places and religions. Through stories one can comprehend how very different people share similar and many-a-time the same life experiences; world and how human nature can transcend culture although living in different parts of the. With shared experiences from varied cultures and awareness about different traditions and values that aid in divulging differences and encouraging concord of cultures around the world, stories help to improve intercultural understanding, foster cross-cultural communication and help people adapt to a multicultural environment and multicultural workplace.



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Poetry

Adamson *et al.* (1999:112) connect ESL and poetry and have this to say: Poetry has a sense of permanence and performance not afforded to a letter, memo or other communicative classroom exercise. It also gives permission to intimate feelings which don't necessarily have a place elsewhere in the language classroom. For these reasons, language learners have much to offer poetry, and poetry has much to offer them.

French (1979) has this to say: 'learners gain insight into humanity via poetry, as well as gain a sense of ownership of the language'. To William Hazlitt, poetry 'is the language of imagination and passions'. To Salvatore Quasimodo, 'poetry is the revelation of a feeling that the poet believes to be interior and personal which the reader recognizes as his own'. It is a literary expression in which words are used in a concentrated blend of sound and imagery to create an emotional response', and who can forget Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as 'spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions'?

Poetry definitely strikes the emotional chords of the reader and evokes emotions and feelings much more than any other literary genre. The influence of poems like Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' or Rabindranath Tagore's 'Where the Mind is Without Fear' have on each person who reads or hears it is astounding. Hence poems would enhance readers' emotional lives and increase their empathy.

The Guardian News reported on its website that studies from the University at Buffalo indicate readers put themselves in the place of protagonists while reading, making them more sympathetic toward characters. These results echoed conclusions reached in a similar study from 2008 conducted by Keith Oatley, Professor at the University of Toronto. By stepping into another's life, readers shared experiences they could not have otherwise and demonstrated greater empathy for these characters. These are changes Oatley believes readers carry into everyday life, which could have a profound positive effect on society. (<http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/>)



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Dramas

Dramas help not only to improve communication skills; they also raise the learners' awareness towards life and culture. They help to inculcate learners with sympathy and empathy as they associate themselves with the sorrows and pains of the protagonist in the drama. They help to stimulate learners' imagination, improve their listening skills, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving skills as they wonder how the protagonist would emerge a victor. They assist in improving social awareness among the learners. Dramas can also succour in developing sensitivity with exposure to social problems and provide new insights and new understandings. The many tragedies of Shakespeare – be it Hamlet or Lady Macbeth; Othello or King Lear - may be used to make students understand emotions and to express them appropriately and effectively.

Biographies, Autobiographies and Speeches

Life histories and narrations of the life episodes of the many who have struggled to win their goal and made an indelible mark in this world may be used to inspire young minds. These biographies and autobiographies will provide an insight into the many trials and tribulations faced by these eminent personalities and the many conflicts and stress they encountered in order to achieve their aim. Their lives will make the learners understand that nothing comes easy in life and their success was because they held on firm to their aim and did not bow to pressure. These great people have achieved it through their personal and social competence – self- motivation and relationship management – paving way for them to emerge as beacons of light with their head held high.

Emotions and Expressions

As emotions are expressed through verbal and non-verbal communication, the two- emotions and communication - are intermingled and inseparable. Interpersonal communication skills involve two or more to speak; but every person is always communicating with oneself to make the right decisions, to gain confidence, to face challenges and to control one's feelings and emotions when angry or perturbed – which is nothing but intrapersonal communication. It is these two prime communication skills- interpersonal and intrapersonal or emotional



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intelligence that need to be developed in college graduates as human resource are perhaps the most essential components in any business.

Why the English Language Facilitator?

In this era of globalization, English language has established itself as the principal language of communication. It is the language that is spoken in the world of power and business and hence the main language in any workplace. Documents are written, sent and preserved in English. It is the accepted language that is spoken over the phone across the professional world. Hence it is the language that is used to express emotions in any workplace- be it anger, conflict, deadline pressures, stress, pain, sorrow, misery, humiliation- the list is endless. Thus, it befits the English teacher in any institution to think of ways to instil emotional intelligence and coach students with the requisite communication skills – both verbal and non-verbal; build self-esteem and confidence in the individuals and eventually equip the students with personal and social competence to confront the problems they may encounter when they step into an organization in search of a successful career.

Improving emotions and expressions is not an easy task and will take a lot of time. It requires the facilitator to be patient, committed to the task and above all believe in success. The facilitator should also create a positive learning environment in the class room and should be warm, friendly and approachable.

The facilitator needs to teach the learners not only to listen actively, to ask and speak appropriately using the right words and the apt tone; he or she should also teach the learners to share, to accept responsibility for their actions and decisions, to tackle peer pressure and be a successful team player.

Conclusion

Literature is not only a tool for developing communication skills in English; it is a treasure house of emotions and can be exploited to the maximum to develop emotional intelligence in learners. Literary texts – be it biographies, autobiographies, poems, prose passages, plays or short stories – have the potential to build learners' personal, social and cultural competence;



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and prepare them to meet all workplace challenges in this globalized era with equanimity and elegance.

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