

Fostering emotional intelligence through literature

Literature sometimes is stereotypically viewed as a written form of language, far removed from the real life everyday communication. But experience proves it can be an effective tool in learning foreign languages. On the one hand, literature represents valuable authentic material, representing grammar structures, speech patterns and vocabulary in context.

On the other hand, it gives the reader an emotional and personal experience and fosters emotional intelligence.

Children develop emotional intelligence during the early years of life. Emotional intelligence is associated with academic achievement and personal relationships. Emotional intelligence is defined as 'knowing what one's feelings are and using that knowledge to make good decisions'. The ability to empathize develops as a result of experience and interaction with others. However, today's children sometimes seem to lack the ability to empathize, negotiate, co-operate. It can have negative consequences on their academic achievement and their interpersonal relationship. These factors may lead to behavior problems, alienation, and perhaps even aggression and violence.

Therefore, there are a number of good reasons for using literature in class, in particular, the potential of literature to nurture emotional intelligence and caring communication. A learner who lacks personal experiences with empathy may, through repeated experiences provided by literature, develop some readiness for empathy. Carefully introduced literature may introduce the learner to the language of empathy in English speaking countries and thus facilitate recognition and expression of empathic feelings.

Literature will also promote language learning by enriching a learner's vocabulary and modeling new structures. Quality literature provides models for rich natural language and can be helpful for understanding the target culture and training cross-cultural competence.