

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL FIND KEY IDEAS ON
CITIZENSHIP • EMOTIONS • ENVIRONMENT • ISSUES • SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Geography and the emotions

Geography is about places, and places can provoke powerful emotional reactions. Dramatically beautiful places evoke feelings of awe and wonder and harsh environments a sense of fear or alienation. People feel affection for otherwise ordinary places which have personal significance. Environmental issues, too, can arouse strong passions, as witnessed by any proposal to build a new by-pass, demolish an attractive building, limit car usage or cut carbon emissions.

The term emotional literacy was first used by Claude Steiner. He suggests emotional literacy has three elements: 'the ability to understand your emotions, the ability to listen to others and empathise with their emotions, and the ability to express emotions productively' (Steiner and Perry, 1997, p. 11).

The term emotional intelligence has been popularised by Daniel Goleman, who argues that emotional intelligence may be more important than intelligence quotient (IQ) for success in life (Goleman, 1996). Building on Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1984), Goleman suggests that emotional intelligence involves five main domains. The first three of these relate to what Gardner refers to as intrapersonal intelligence, whereas the last two relate to the interpersonal aspects of emotional quotient (EQ):

1. Knowing one's emotions involves self awareness and recognising feelings as they happen, and is the keystone of emotional intelligence.
2. Managing emotions is concerned with self regulation and handling feelings in an appropriate way.
3. Motivating oneself is concerned with goal achievement and so is essential for maintaining attention, self-motivation, and creativity.

4. Recognising emotions in others involves understanding others and developing empathy, and is a fundamental interpersonal skill.
5. Handling relationships is concerned with social competence and is therefore related to the ability to influence others, communicate well, manage conflict and work collaboratively.

Goleman has created world-wide interest in the concept of emotional intelligence, arguing that teaching pupils the skills of emotional literacy is as important as teaching other forms of literacy:

'In navigating our lives, it is our fears and envies, our rages and depressions, our worries and anxieties that steer us day to day. Even the most academically brilliant amongst us are vulnerable to being undone by unruly emotions. The price we paid for emotional illiteracy is in failed marriages and troubled families, in stunted social and work lives, in deteriorating physical health and mental anguish' (Goleman, 1996, p. 43).

The two concepts are closely related, and are often used interchangeably. Emotional literacy appears to be a broader term, increasingly used in education, while emotional intelligence is more associated with business and leadership.

To nurture emotional literacy and emotional intelligence we need to attend to children's feelings and reactions. Emotionally literate people are able to recognise and manage their own feelings and build constructive and effective relationships with others. It is now widely recognised that emotional intelligence is crucial for success in personal and professional life (Goleman, 1996). The difference between emotional literacy and emotional intelligence is explored in Figure 1.

Geography has a particular contribution to make to the development of emotional literacy because the study of real places, real people and real-life issues is at its core. In investigating places, people and issues, primary age pupils can explore the significance of the affective domain in relation to place, space and the environment.

Figure 1 | Emotional literacy and emotional intelligence.

This chapter shows how studying places and issues in primary geography can provide a context within which emotional literacy or intelligence may be fostered and nurtured. Although some useful general guidance for teachers on fostering children's emotional development (e.g. Greenhaugh, 1994) and on promoting emotional literacy (e.g. Sharp, 2001; Antidote, 2003; Weare, 2003) has been published, little has yet been written about the development of emotional literacy in specific subject areas.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the importance of the affective domain in learning, and outlines the arguments for developing children's personal and interpersonal skills. This involves exploring how the concepts of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence relate to geography and the wider primary curriculum. There then follows a review of the evidence concerning children's feelings about places, and discussion about how a focus on this can enhance and enliven the study of places and environmental issues. The chapter then considers the role of geography in promoting the interpersonal skills associated with emotional intelligence, and concludes with the characteristics of emotionally literate geography.

Educating the emotions

There is a long tradition of interest in the role of education in promoting emotional development which may be traced back to the work of John Dewey and other progressive educators. But, as Suzie Orbach, a psychoanalyst and co-founder of Antidote (a national charity set up in 1995 to promote emotional literacy) has argued, the recent focus on raising standards and on targets, tests and league tables has meant that 'it has been difficult for arguments about the importance of emotional development in schooling to find a place on the agenda' (Orbach, 1998). Indeed the philosophical underpinning for the national curriculum derives ultimately from the work of thinkers such as Kant and Descartes who specifically separated the affective and the intellectual.

However, recent developments in neuroscience suggest that there are strong links between emotion and thinking, and that feeling and understanding are deeply interconnected. We now know that the mid-brain, the amygdala and limbic system control our emotions, and that the upper-brain, or neo-cortex, is the 'thinking' part of the brain. It seems that learning requires activity in both the limbic system and neo-cortex. Carter (1999) suggests that the neuro-connections between the two parts of the brain mean that the cortex can control emotions originating in the limbic system, but that the connections take time to develop. This helps to explain young children's relative lack of control of their emotions. 'The young brain is essentially unbalanced – the immature cortex [is] no match for the powerful amygdala' (Carter, 1999, p. 90).

Our new understanding of the significance of emotions in learning suggests that paying more attention to the affective domain may help to raise standards of achievement across the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs are particularly likely to benefit whether they are slow learners or gifted and talented. McCarthy and Park (1998) argue that emotional learning matters because:



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- understanding emotions is directly connected with motivation and with cognitive achievement;
- dealing with emotions helps to develop better relationships and a sense of psychological and mental well-being;
- emotionally developed young people are better equipped to live with difference;
- our moral outlook and value systems are deeply shaped by our attitudes and feelings; and
- our sense of meaning and purpose is derived as much from feeling as from understanding.

Emotional literacy in the school curriculum

In terms of the wider curriculum framework, emotional literacy and intelligence have particularly strong links with personal, social and health education (PSHE). PSHE is concerned with preparing children for life now and in the future. It is about developing their self-knowledge, their ability to understand and manage their feelings, to build relationships with other pupils and adults, and to understand their local community and national society. As Elaine Jackson has comprehensively demonstrated, there are strong natural connections between primary geography and PSHE. Both provide opportunities to express opinions; to develop an understanding of the place of the individual in society, and of collective rights and responsibilities; to develop empathy, and an awareness of the points of view of others, and cultural understanding of other societies. In addition, active learning in geography requires purposeful pupil interaction, group activities, co-operative working, collaboration, reasoned debate, negotiation and informed decision-making. (Jackson, 2000, p. 34).

A decade ago, Frances Slater suggested that geography education should seek to develop both reason and feeling (Slater, 1994), echoing a persistent argument that really meaningful learning in any subject engages both the intellect and emotions. Geography offers three major opportunities for developing emotional literacy:

- It helps children to recognise and express emotions associated with places and environmental issues;
- It provides opportunities to develop empathetic understanding of others' feelings and views; and
- It develops interpersonal skills through the active learning approaches required by meaningful geographical enquiry.

Attachment to place

It is well known that secure attachment to significant people is important for young children's psychological growth and health. It is also argued that attachment to place can be equally significant, for 'to be attached to places and have profound ties with them is an important human need' (Relph, 1976). Identification with and attachment to place is expressed in many ways, such as supporting a local football team, identifying oneself as a Yorkshire woman, campaigning to preserve a locally significant building, or studying local history. Most people appear to be interested in and care about the place they live, and this attachment to place seems to have its roots in childhood experiences.

For many adults some of their strongest memories and recollections of childhood relate to places. Most of us recall in some detail, and often with affection, the homes where we were



raised, the buildings in which we were educated, and the places we played in. While I was writing this chapter I drove every day past the site where a gracious but outdated Edwardian school was being replaced. Several weeks before the site was due to be vacated, a large sign appeared outside inviting people to ‘Say goodbye to the old buildings’. This invitation represents an acknowledgement that former pupils, teachers and local residents may have feelings of sadness when a locally significant landmark is demolished. In her study of adults’ memories of childhood places, Louise Chawla found that affectionate memories were associated with ‘places to which we trace our roots, which are associated with happiness and security ... there is a parallel between the warmth of feeling for the place and people in it’ (Chawla, 1986, quoted in Titman, 1994, p. 7).

Simon Catling argues that children’s experience of places is a vital part of their lives, contributing to their sense of self, identity and self-esteem (Catling, 2003). It is also often said that young children are natural geographers (Scoffham, 1998). From early infancy, they start to learn about their surroundings through direct first-hand experience, and so become familiar with ‘their place’. Through secondary sources of information such as television, books, photographs and pictures, they also begin to form perceptions about ‘other places’ beyond their experience (Goodey, 1971). Both known places and (as yet) unvisited places evoke feelings in, and have meaning for, children and inform their developing sense of place.

☞ *A sense of place describes a particular kind of relationship between individuals and localities. For individuals different places are imbued with different meanings (Matthews, 1992).*

By the time they enter school, children will already have developed knowledge of their familiar environments, and will also have feelings about them. Their environments will be, as Catling points out, not only physical places but also ‘affective places, places for fun and enjoyment with freedom of movement or places of limits, exclusions and, perhaps, fears’ (Catling, 2003, p. 173). During their primary years, children’s experience of known places extends as they are given or take greater freedom to move unsupervised around the local area.

Furthermore, these early childhood experiences have an impact which carries though into adult life. Many of today’s environmental activists, for example, can point to first-hand experiences in the natural world that nurtured their later enthusiasm and interests (Palmer, 1998). The importance of ‘significant life experiences’ of this kind is also recognised in many biographies.

Titman (1994) too notes that children consistently express strong positive reactions to relatively ‘natural’ areas. She found that although they were keenly aware of the intrinsic value of the environment and of the need to care for the natural world as the home of all living things, children also valued natural places because of the way they made them feel. Natural places were judged to be peaceful, but were also associated with freedom, adventure and challenge. Environmental elements seen positively included natural colour, trees, woods, shady areas, big grassy areas, places with different levels, places where you can climb/hide/explore/make a den, places that have ‘millions of bits’, and places with wildlife. Dirt, pollution, rubbish, litter, damaged things, unnatural colour, tarmac, places where you

Special places

Pupils in a year 5 class were asked by their teacher to think about places which were special to them. Many produced carefully executed pictures to show their special place, and wrote about why it mattered to them, and how they felt about it when in it.

Of the 30 pupils, 16 (both boys and girls) nominated their own bedroom as their special place. Many described their bedroom in great detail and explained what they enjoyed doing in it. Bedrooms were referred to as places of safety, where they could relax and 'be themselves'.

'I can have a happy time reading. I am relaxed and calm, especially when I read one of my books or magazines. My bed is very cosy and comfortable and warm. It is blue with daisies all over. I have lots of cuddly toys in my bed and I feel safe.'

'Because nobody shares it me with me – it's always there to turn to when I am sad and weary.'

Several others reported that they valued their bedroom as a place where they could withdraw from family life, especially contact with siblings: *'What I like best is that my brother can't come in'*. Friends, however, were welcome in many bedrooms, as their presence was associated with fun. One pupil offered a particularly detailed picture of her bedroom and what it meant to her:

'My special place is a corner of my room. It has got a bean bag, books, a CD player, games, a cuddly toy, cushions and a lamp. It's special to me because I can have some space and just chill out. I normally just sit down, put my music on low and read a book. It really helps when I do that. If I have just fallen out with my mum and dad, I can relax and get it all out of my system. What I like best is the space to do whatever I want. It really annoys me when people break the atmosphere by knocking on my door, just to ask a stupid question.'

A wide range of other types of places were nominated by the pupils as particularly special to them. These included the local park, a tent, a shed in the garden, a shop owned by parents, a grandma's house, Disneyland Paris, the London Eye, an Indian beach, a fast-food restaurant in India and an aqua park in Corfu.

In many cases these places were associated with enjoyable activities, happy memories, or with people to whom the pupils were attached. The girl who chose the local park said:

'I like this place because I made my first best friend there. I also meet my friends there sometimes, we have lots of fun. It also brings back memories like the time my brother was playing football with his friends and I was the commentator. I feel very relaxed, especially with my friends, and cheerful and glad too. The thing I like best is that you feel free and have a lot of fresh air. The park will always be my special place even if I move away.'

Animals were significant for two girls, one who enjoyed going to her grandma's to play with the dog, and the other to the shed where she kept guinea pigs:

'My special place is in my shed because my guinea pigs comfort me when I'm down, and when my parents tell me off I feel safe and secure when I'm around my guinea pigs and I enjoy stroking them.'

Only one of the year 5 pupils, a girl, nominated a fantasy place; *'a secret hidden away beach'* which she can imagine *'really easily'*, and where she goes (in her imagination) when she feels down or bored, because *'it feels safe'*.

Figure 2 | *Special places – a year 5 case study.*

can't climb/hide/explore/make a den, and places that were 'boring' or 'too open' were all viewed negatively by children in the study.

Working with feelings

One way of helping children to recognise and acknowledge their feelings about their surroundings is by asking them to think about their favourite places. What parts of their home, school and immediate locality do they value and why? Key stage 1 pupils can conduct a survey of the most liked and disliked places in the school grounds or local area, and discuss the results. This will enable them to explore why people tend to feel more positive about some features or areas than others. The study of a contrasting locality, whether in the UK or overseas, should provide opportunities for children to consider the questions 'How do I feel about this place?', and 'How do other people, including those who live there, feel about it?'. As a broader perspective is developed in key stage 2, pupils can consider

their responses to different types of environment – urban, rural, wild and pockets of one within another, e.g. open spaces in an urban area, traditional buildings in rural landscapes. They should be encouraged to attend more deeply to their feelings for the places studied, and to try to understand, articulate and explain them (Figure 2).

At any age, children can be encouraged to express and communicate their affective response to places, spaces and environments in a variety of ways. Many of the oral strategies used in circle time to explore feelings can be successfully adapted to have a geographical focus. For example, the activity 'Someone else's shoes' (Mosley, 1996, p. 163-4) provides a