

The Art of Emotions

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Abstract

It is clear that the effects of the pandemic combined with increased use of social media have contributed to a distinct rise in anxiety, depression and bullying among children and youth in the last five years. These factors can and often do lead to very serious consequences that may have long lasting emotional, mental, and physical impact on ability to learn and sense of well being. Most educators would agree that there is a need to encourage students to demonstrate empathy towards others especially as it relates to building inclusive communities that celebrate individual difference and acceptance of unique qualities of all individuals. There are conflicting theories on whether care towards ourselves and others can be explicitly taught. I would offer empathy towards another is something that needs to be experienced, largely because empathy is something we can agree is a good idea intellectually, but unless we feel it in relationship to someone or something apart from us, we do not really know it. For these reasons I implemented a study to investigate ways active engagement with the arts and reflective practice can support students' mental, emotional, and physical health while encouraging a stronger sense of belonging, empathy and compassionate connection towards themselves and others. Based on evidence collected through qualitative arts-based research, this paper will discuss the importance of students of acquiring emotional literacy as a way to understand their own feelings as well and "read" the emotional states of others.

Keywords: aesthetics, empathy, emotional literacy, mental health, reflective practice