Book Reviews

Warming the Emotional Climate of the Primary School Classroom

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The topic of this book is of importance to all professionals who work with children. Development and problems in development involve transactions and interactions of individuals with others in social contexts (Keogh, 1998; Prinstein & Roberts, 2006). Psychologists have long considered parents to be important socialisation agents, yet research documenting links between child functioning and other social contexts argue for broadened perspectives that include peer and school environments (Pianta, 2006; Walker, 2010). For psychologists who serve children, recognition of the association of childhood difficulties with problems at school or with peers is not new, a finding often conceptualised to indicate impairment in children's functioning. Whereas difficulties at school may be viewed from the perspective that psychological symptoms affect person-context transactions, Evans and Harvey (2012) urge readers to also consider the other directional hypothesis, i.e., the person-context transactions children experience in their primary school classrooms may affect their socio-emotional functioning and development. Moreover, the authors contend, considering this possibility presents opportunities for nurturing children's positive adaptation by *'warming the emotional climate of primary school classroom'*.

This text embodies the convergence of two lines of scholarship for Evans, expertise in clinical child psychology (Evans, 1999) and interests in promoting contextually and culturally relevant research by and for psychologists in Aotearoa New Zealand (Evans, 2008; Evans & Fitzgerald, 2007). The text also represents a collaborative effort. The collaboration between Evans, an academic clinical psychologist, and Harvey, who has worked as an educational psychologist, is in keeping with the perspective that better understanding and improving the realities of children are common aims for child-oriented psychologists working within sub-disciplines of psychology (Power, 2003; Schaughency & Ervin, 2006), with intra- and inter-disciplinary collaboration specifically advocated as a means to better serve children in Aotearoa New Zealand (France, Annan, Tarren-Sweeney & Butler, 2007).

In many ways the research described in the text is an exemplar for psychologists working in Aotearoa New Zealand, in keeping with guidelines for the professional practice of psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our Core Competencies indicate that (a) scientific evidence should guide our work but (b) we should also have the skill to evaluate whether research is applicable in the New Zealand context (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2006, p. 4). Arguably, the best way to evaluate whether research fits the local context is to conduct research within that context (Schaughency & Ervin, 2006), with the research on which this book is based conducted in the south-central North Island. Moreover, our Competencies remind psychologists working in Aotearoa New Zealand of our

obligations to be mindful of diversity, culture, and, particularly, partners of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi. Specific recommendations provided by the Competencies are to include others in data collection and analysis and consult with culturally knowledgeable people (p. 5). To begin to describe emotional climate in primary school classrooms, the authors first sought input from teachers considered to create positive emotional atmospheres in their classrooms, which resulted in a sample of approximately equal numbers of teachers described of Māori (45%) and European (55%) descent in an area in which only 5% of teachers are reported to be Māori (Evans & Harvey, 2012, p. 70). To further evaluate bicultural acceptability and relevance of their model of emotional climate for Māori teachers, Evans and Harvey partnered with Herbert, a Māori psychologist (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Paretekawa), who engaged a group of Māori participants with educational and cultural expertise (p. 102). Finally, the aim of text to serve a resource for enhancing the classroom climate and, thereby, children's positive adaptation is in keeping with competency guidelines to identify contextual factors that provide opportunities for positive change (New Zealand Psychologist's Board, 2006, p. 7) and build solutions based on positive supports existing in the environment (p. 8), to name a few.

Trying to demystify hazy, but none-the-less real and important, constructs such as climate is a formidable task, especially when the end is to promote change (enhancing climate and child adaptation). For those working to facilitate positive change in complex social systems like classrooms in schools, conceptual clarity may help psychologists or other change agents to formulate and develop intervention plans or programme development efforts (Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Schaughency & Ervin, 2006). Organisational researchers find it useful to distinguish between concepts referring to the way things are done in an

organisational setting (*culture*; Glisson, Dukes & Green, 2006) and the positive or negative impact of the environment on psychological well-being (*climate*; Glisson & Green, 2006). Although these are distinguishable constructs, research also suggests that they are inter-related, with both contributing to service delivery and children's outcomes (Glisson et al., 2006; Glisson & Green, 2006). Clarity in level of analysis can likewise assist formulation and planning (Ervin & Schaughency, 2008; Schaughency & Ervin, 2006). What is the organisational setting you are targeting? Is it the culture of a particular classroom or a broader organisational level, such as a syndicate or school? If you are interested in the subjective experience of climate, climate as experienced by whom? Is it the teacher or a student in a class? As an individual psychological variable, the experienced climate may not be shared by all persons in that setting (students in a class; teachers in a school) but when individuals share similar perceptions of the impact of the environment on well-being, results may be aggregated to describe climate at group (e.g., class) or organisational (e.g., school) levels (Glisson, 2002).

In closing, a recurrent theme throughout this review has been that *'warming the primary classroom'* may foster children's *positive adaptation*. The term positive adaptation was used to acknowledge the dual nature of positive development from a psychological perspective: internal functioning (subjective well-being) and environmental functioning (effective performance in age-salient developmental tasks) (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2009). Although the terms used in school-based research vary, with researchers sometimes using terms like engagement or connectedness, evidence is accumulating to indicate that children's subjective experience of school matters, with important relations to academic (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012), mental health (Bond, Butler, Thomas, Carlin, Glover, Bowes, & Patton, 2007) and health (Carter, McGee, Taylor, & Williams, 2007) outcomes for children and adolescents. Such findings highlight the significance of efforts

to better understand and ultimately enhance the developmental context of schooling, such as those described in by Evans and Harvey (2012), for all psychologists who work with children and young people.

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