

---

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Markowitz, Nancy Lourié and Bouffard, S.M. (2020). *Teaching with a Social, Emotional, and Cultural Lens: A Framework for Educators and Teacher Educators*. Harvard Education Press. Paperback, 232 pp., ISBN: 9781682534748, US\$ 32**

*Reviewed by B. Mythiri*

The book titled *Teaching with a Social, Emotional and Cultural Lens: A Framework for Educators and Teacher Educators* is authored by two accomplished researchers in the field of Social Emotional Learning, Nancy Lourie Markowits and Suzanne M. Bouffard. The authors of the book gathered the results of a decade of research and practice which could act as a field guide for educators. The book attempts to develop the Social, Emotional and Cultural competencies of the teachers in a classroom by making them look through a cultural “lens”. The book is organized into seven chapters, each entitled as follows: Chapter 1: ‘The Case for a Social, Emotional, and Cultural Lens in Teaching’ which introduces the readers with the Anchor Competencies and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills that can be integrated with the curriculum. Chapter 2: ‘The Anchor Competencies Framework’ clearly explains the elements of the framework. Chapter 3: ‘Integrating the Framework in Classroom Practice’ helps the teachers successfully implement the anchor competencies in their classrooms. Chapter 4: ‘Laying the Groundwork in Pre-service Teacher Education’ explains how remarkable it is to include these anchor competencies in the curriculum of pre-service teachers. Chapter 5: ‘Incorporating the Framework in Schools’ insists on integrating these skills firmly in institutions as a part of teacher professional development and thus help teacher growth in the long run. Chapter 6: ‘Building the Bridge to Connect Theory and Practice’ suggests the practice of Social Emotional Competencies and culturally responsive teaching practices on a larger scale by the educators across universities, districts and states. The final Chapter 7: ‘A Vision for the Future’ exhorts the educators,

administrators, faculty, and others related to the field of education to stick to the tenets of the framework and make it possible in real life classroom situations.

The book is grounded on the framework designed by the Centre for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child (CRTWC) which relies on the competencies proposed by the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The seven anchor competencies intends to build trusting relationships, foster self-reflection, foster growth-mindset, cultivate perseverance, create community, promote collaborative learning, and respond constructively across differences. CRTWC worked on integrating the above-mentioned anchors with a culturally responsive teaching lens based on the 5 Social, Emotional competencies proposed by CASEL. Culturally responsive teaching is to ensure that the teachers do not ignore the cultural aspects and environment of a classroom, but wear an extra lens to stay focused on those cultural differences. The seven anchors are based on the competencies proposed by CASEL such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skill, and responsible decision-making. 'CRTWC Anchor Competencies Framework' functions as a classroom guide for the teachers and teacher educators and is based on the three interconnected dimensions: learning context, students' SEL, and teachers' SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

The framework is represented in infographic format as a ripple made by the pebble (SEL) in the pond of water (education) where the rings are titled as Goals, Context, Developing the lens, Anchor Competencies and Examples of Teacher Moves. The innermost circle represents the goals that the teachers must reach through their teaching and the context provides the ways of achieving them. The context ring emphasizes that the goals must be achieved through education that is placed in the context of socio-political, cultural structures as well as family and individual systems. The circle 'Developing the Lens' gives a hint of how and what skills are to be practised in order to attain the competencies. It proclaims the habits that would lead an individual to achieve the goals. The Anchor Competencies ring clearly states the seven competencies based on which the theory is built and gives an idea to the practitioners of what must be the results of teaching SEL. The educators are expected to apply these competencies in practice as a part of their day-to-day teaching. The outermost ring gives examples of teaching practices that the educators must facilitate in the classroom.

The objective of the book is to blend in the professional development ideology for teachers and to look at a classroom through a cultural perspective irrespective of the different educational streams or academic institutions one is associated with. The framework aims at encouraging the teachers to change their perspectives and always work towards the SEL growth of the students by giving lucid examples and models. It motivates the teachers to ensure a positive environment in a classroom, use a warm tone, give constructive feedback and practise inclusivity despite their cultural differences. An adequate number of sample lesson templates are given at the end of the final chapter in the book which can be used by the teachers in their day-to-day classes. These templates would help the teachers constantly reaffirm whether their teaching methodologies are attuned with social-emotional competencies.

The Anchor Competencies Programme Matrix is one such tool created by the CRTWC to ensure that all the Anchor Competencies are equally addressed by the teachers. This framework has a purview to be largely appreciated by the academicians as equal importance is spread across all the competencies. This would in turn help the teachers consider, treat, and practise every skill as equally crucial. There is a possibility of the teachers to focus only on a few competencies and ignore the rest. In those cases, this framework and the model templates would help the teachers stay on track. The authors of the book suggest that “the lens has to be modelled by the faculty, explored through ongoing in-depth conversations, and be practised on a regular basis with ample opportunities for discussion and reflection.”

The book is formulated in such a way that the authors divulge their experiences with ample or sufficient examples to make the teachers understand the importance of integrating the Social Emotional Learning skills and also to look through a lens by situating the students within a cultural setting which were so far ignored. From the perspective of the reader, it is an interesting read that allows one to relate to the incidents described in the book with that of one’s day-to-day classroom practices. It makes them recollect similar situations and reflect on their reactions as teachers with the students in certain classroom circumstances. It provides the teachers with some opportunities to rethink their teaching methodologies. Teachers would realize how alternative ways of teaching methodologies and approaches in their classrooms as modelled by the examples in the book could have been implied. It would have helped

them deal with the emotions of the students effortlessly. For the novice educators, reading the book could be akin to engaging in a conversation with the veteran teachers who are capable of mentoring them.

Currently, there is a lack of studies in integrating and applying SEL in higher educational classrooms for adolescents. Model exercises that can be practised in undergraduate classrooms are lacking in the curriculum. There are practices existing to develop the non-academic skills of the students under various names such as employability skills and soft skills, character education, personality development, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and non-cognitive skills (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Whereas, Social Emotional Learning as a framework has not been practically implemented in the higher educational context. With reference to the book, the examples given are limited to the experiences related to teachers who handle students from pre-school to 6<sup>th</sup> grade utmost. On the other hand, SEL competencies are supposed to be mastered and practised by children, adolescents and teachers who represent the adult category. The model routines given in the text like having a “lazy corner” or “freak out zone” as well as “thumbs-up” activities that help students cope with their emotional breakdowns might only be practically applicable to the school students. It is expected of university professors to manage the issues that are significantly more complex. Dealing with the emotional intelligence of the teenagers could be demanding and hence the university educators might require proper training during the pre-service as well as in-service years.

This book serves as a touchstone for educators who are constantly looking for a framework to help them expand their teaching approaches in a way that would evolve with the established curriculum and allow them to incorporate social and emotional intelligence for the benefit of the students. It serves as a support system that enables them to practise, reflect, and model SEL competencies through a cultural lens in the classroom. While most of the books authored so far do not explicitly provide a clear idea of practically including emotional intelligence skills in the classroom, this work is a promising guide to help the educators.

*B. Mythiri is a research scholar in the National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli. Her areas of interest include ELT, social emotional learning, curriculum development, and decolonizing education.  
mythiri.nitt@gmail.com*