

## ROLE OF EMOTIONAL LITERACY IN NURTURING INCLUSIVE LEARNING CULTURES

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### Abstract

Emotional literacy has emerged as a key enabler of inclusive and sustainable learning environments. Defined as the ability to recognise, understand, express, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, it fosters safe, empathetic, and collaborative learning spaces. This review examines how emotional literacy supports inclusive learning cultures, particularly in non-formal and community-based contexts where learners often face social, economic, and educational disadvantages. Four core components: emotional awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and interpersonal communication are identified as foundational to engagement, mutual respect, and well-being. Educators and facilitators who model these competencies influence the emotional climate of learning spaces, strengthening belonging and motivation among diverse learners. Practices such as relational pedagogy, reflective dialogue, and emotionally responsive teaching are highlighted as effective strategies for advancing inclusion. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature, programme evaluations, and international case studies, the review explores how emotional literacy operates within neighbourhood and community learning environments that frequently serve excluded or underserved populations. It demonstrates how emotional literacy can re-engage marginalized learners, enhance communication, and build social cohesion. The analysis is guided by two central questions: (1) *What are the key components of emotional literacy that position it as a strategic enabler of transformative learning?* and (2) *How can emotional literacy support personal growth, social cohesion, and educational equity in inclusive and sustainable learning contexts?* Using a qualitative synthesis of existing research and policy reviews, the article identifies promising practices alongside persistent gaps, including the absence of scalable models in low-resource settings and limited longitudinal evidence of impact. The review concludes that emotional literacy must be recognised not as a supplementary skill but as a core dimension of inclusive educational design. Integrating it into professional development, community-based curricula, and local partnerships is recommended to cultivate emotionally intelligent learning ecosystems that promote equity, resilience, and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Emotional literacy, inclusive learning cultures, sustainable learning neighbourhoods, lifelong learning, educational equity

### Introduction

The contemporary landscape of education is marked by increasing diversity, rapid social change, and persistent inequities that challenge traditional approaches to teaching and learning. In this context, inclusive learning cultures - learning environments that embrace diversity, promote equity, and nurture belonging - have become a central aspiration of global educational reform (Booth & Ainscow, 2016). While cognitive achievement remains a priority, there is growing recognition that learners' social and emotional dimensions profoundly shape their educational journeys (OECD, 2020). Emotional literacy, broadly understood as the capacity to recognize, understand, express, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, has emerged as a strategic enabler of inclusive and sustainable learning environments (Steiner, 1997; Goleman, 1995). The importance of emotional literacy is two-

fold. On one hand, it equips learners with competencies that enhance self-awareness, empathy, and social connectedness, which are indispensable for active participation in pluralistic societies (CASEL, 2023). On the other hand, it supports educators and facilitators in designing emotionally responsive pedagogies that address not only intellectual but also affective needs of learners (Noddings, 2013). By situating emotions at the heart of pedagogy, emotional literacy challenges the long-standing dichotomy between cognition and affect in education and underscores the interdependence of intellectual growth and emotional well-being (Damasio, 1994).

A distinctive contribution of emotional literacy lies in its ability to bridge inclusion gaps in both formal and non-formal learning contexts. Learners from marginalized backgrounds - whether due to poverty, disability, migration, or systemic exclusion - often experience alienation within traditional educational settings (Freire, 1970/2018). Community-based and non-formal learning environments have attempted to respond to these challenges by fostering more flexible, relational, and participatory modes of engagement (Brookfield, 2013). Within these spaces, emotional literacy functions as a resource for re-engaging excluded learners, nurturing resilience, and cultivating a sense of belonging.

This review article is guided by two central questions:

- *What are the key components of emotional literacy that position it as a strategic enabler of transformative learning?*
- *How can emotional literacy support personal growth, social cohesion, and educational equity in the context of inclusive and sustainable learning environments?*

In addressing these questions, the review synthesizes insights from interdisciplinary literature, programme evaluations, and international case studies. It positions emotional literacy not as a supplementary “soft skill” but as a core dimension of inclusive educational design. The article argues that embedding emotional literacy within professional development, community-based curricula, and educational policy can contribute to the creation of emotionally intelligent learning ecosystems that advance both individual flourishing and collective well-being.

## **Conceptual Foundations of Emotional Literacy**

### **Defining Emotional Literacy and the Core Components**

The concept of emotional literacy has evolved over several decades and is often discussed alongside related constructs such as emotional intelligence, socio-emotional learning (SEL), and affective education. Steiner (1997) popularized the term *emotional literacy* to emphasize the learnability of emotional skills, distinguishing it from innate traits. Unlike emotional intelligence, which is frequently measured through psychometric tools, emotional literacy highlights the practical application of emotional skills in everyday relationships and community life (Sharp, 2001).

At its core, emotional literacy refers to the ability to:

- Recognize one’s own emotions with accuracy,
- Understand the emotions of others,
- Express emotions appropriately and authentically, and
- Regulate emotional responses constructively (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

These competencies enable individuals to engage empathetically with others, resolve conflicts peacefully, and sustain cooperative relationships - qualities that are central to inclusive learning.

The roots of emotional literacy can be traced to multiple traditions. In psychology, the work of Mayer and Salovey (1997) introduced the notion of emotional intelligence as a set of interrelated abilities for perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions. In education, scholars of humanistic pedagogy such as Rogers (1969) emphasized the role of empathy,

authenticity, and unconditional positive regard in fostering student growth. Meanwhile, in social work and community education, attention to affective dimensions of empowerment has long been central to practices that address marginalization and exclusion (Brookfield, 2013). Emotional literacy, therefore, is not a new invention but rather an integrative framework that draws together insights from psychology, pedagogy, and community development. Its emphasis on relational and communicative practices makes it particularly relevant for education systems that aim to be both inclusive and transformative.

Most scholars converge on four core components that together constitute emotional literacy (Steiner, 1997; Goleman, 1995):

- Emotional Awareness – The ability to accurately identify and label one’s own emotions, as well as to recognize emotions in others. Awareness is the foundation for reflective learning and helps prevent misinterpretations in social interactions.
- Empathy – The capacity to perceive and resonate with others’ emotional states, coupled with the willingness to act with compassion. Empathy underpins inclusive pedagogies by enabling educators to connect with learners’ diverse experiences and perspectives (Noddings, 2013).
- Self-Regulation – The ability to manage one’s emotions effectively, avoiding impulsive reactions and cultivating resilience under stress. For learners, self-regulation supports perseverance and adaptability; for educators, it ensures balanced and constructive classroom climates (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016).
- Interpersonal Communication – The skills of expressing emotions appropriately, listening actively, and engaging in dialogue that fosters trust and respect. Communication is the medium through which emotional literacy manifests in relationships and group learning (Sharp, 2001).

Together, these components represent a holistic skill set that integrates cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of human functioning.

The growing attention to emotional literacy reflects a broader “affective turn” in education. Scholars have increasingly challenged the dominance of rationalist and technocratic models of learning that prioritize test scores and standardized outcomes (Biesta, 2010). Instead, they argue for educational approaches that recognize learners as whole persons whose emotions, identities, and social relations profoundly shape their engagement with knowledge.

Research in neuroscience further reinforces this shift by demonstrating that emotional processes are inseparable from cognitive functioning. Damasio’s (1994) work on the role of emotions in decision-making and learning underscores that cognition cannot be divorced from affect. Thus, cultivating emotional literacy is not an optional enrichment activity but a prerequisite for meaningful and sustained learning.

It is important to distinguish emotional literacy from other frequently used terms:

- Emotional Intelligence (EI): Often conceptualized as a set of measurable abilities or traits, EI tends to emphasize individual competencies (Mayer et al., 2016). Emotional literacy, in contrast, emphasizes relational and community-oriented practices.
- Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL): A widely adopted framework in schools, SEL encompasses programmes designed to build students’ social and emotional skills (CASEL, 2023). Emotional literacy aligns with SEL but places stronger emphasis on critical awareness and communication, particularly relevant in community and non-formal settings.
- Well-being Education: While overlapping with emotional literacy, well-being education tends to focus on outcomes such as happiness and resilience. Emotional literacy foregrounds the processes and interactions through which these outcomes are achieved (Noddings, 2013).

By situating emotional literacy within this broader constellation, educators and policymakers can better appreciate its unique contribution to inclusive learning cultures.

### **Emotional Literacy as a Foundation for Inclusion**

Inclusive education is not only about providing equal access to learning opportunities but also about creating environments where all learners feel valued, respected, and supported. Emotional literacy plays a foundational role in this process because it enables both educators and learners to engage meaningfully in diverse learning communities. By cultivating empathy, emotional awareness, and constructive communication, emotional literacy fosters a climate of mutual respect that is indispensable for inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2016).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) emphasizes inclusive education as a human right, calling for schools and community learning centres to dismantle barriers of discrimination. Scholars argue that achieving this requires more than structural reforms; it demands an affective shift in how educators relate to learners and how learners relate to each other (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Emotional literacy provides the tools for this shift by embedding relational values - care, empathy, and respect into everyday educational practice.

Research demonstrates that the emotional climate of classrooms significantly influences learner engagement, motivation, and achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Classrooms where teachers demonstrate warmth, sensitivity, and emotional responsiveness tend to show lower dropout rates, higher participation, and greater learner persistence. Emotional literacy equips educators to read subtle emotional cues, respond appropriately, and create psychologically safe learning spaces (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). For learners from marginalized backgrounds - such as those facing poverty, migration, or disability - emotional safety is particularly critical. Studies suggest that learners who feel emotionally excluded are more likely to disengage and less likely to persist in education (Osher et al., 2020). By integrating emotional literacy into teaching practice, educators can reduce alienation, affirm learners' identities, and encourage active participation.

Relational pedagogy emphasizes the centrality of human relationships in teaching and learning. Noddings (2013) argues that caring relationships form the basis of effective pedagogy because they affirm learners as whole persons rather than as mere recipients of knowledge. Emotional literacy strengthens relational pedagogy by providing educators with the skills to:

- Listen empathetically,
- Respond to learners' emotional needs,
- Communicate with authenticity, and
- Foster reciprocity in teacher-learner interactions.

Empirical studies indicate that relationally oriented teachers not only enhance academic outcomes but also build inclusive cultures of trust and belonging (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). In such settings, emotional literacy operates as the connective tissue that sustains meaningful relationships across diverse groups of learners.

Another strategy linked with emotional literacy is the use of reflective dialogue - structured conversations that encourage learners to articulate their feelings, experiences, and perspectives. Such dialogue supports both self-awareness and empathy by making emotions part of the collective learning process (Mezirow, 2000). It also encourages learners to critically examine how emotions intersect with power, inequality, and social norms, thereby linking emotional literacy with transformative learning.

For example, case studies from adult literacy programmes in Latin America show that incorporating reflective dialogue around personal experiences of exclusion not only builds emotional resilience but also strengthens group solidarity (Mayo, 2013). Through such

practices, emotional literacy supports not just personal growth but also collective empowerment, which is essential for inclusive education.

Emotionally responsive teaching involves educators adapting their pedagogy based on learners' emotional cues. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) describe this as part of "emotionally supportive classrooms," where teachers demonstrate sensitivity, regulate their own emotions effectively, and use proactive strategies to prevent conflict.

- Research highlights several benefits of emotionally responsive teaching:
- Improved classroom management through non-punitive approaches,
- Reduced stress and burnout among teachers,
- Enhanced learner cooperation and collaboration, and
- Strengthened sense of belonging for marginalized learners (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

In inclusive settings, emotionally responsive teaching ensures that learners with diverse needs - such as children with autism spectrum disorders, trauma backgrounds, or second-language learners - can thrive without being stigmatized.

Ultimately, emotional literacy contributes to educational equity by addressing the hidden curriculum of emotions that often privileges some learners while marginalizing others. For example, schools that ignore the emotional dimensions of racism, gender bias, or disability discrimination risk perpetuating inequities (Gillborn, 2015). By contrast, emotionally literate educators create spaces where learners' cultural and emotional identities are affirmed, thereby supporting inclusive belonging.

Belonging is not only a subjective feeling but also a structural condition of inclusion. Walton and Brady (2017) argue that when learners experience belonging uncertainty - doubts about whether they are valued in a learning environment - their academic performance and persistence decline. Emotional literacy provides educators with the skills to counteract belonging uncertainty, thereby reinforcing both academic success and social cohesion.

### **Applications in Non-Formal and Community-Based Learning Contexts**

Non-formal and community-based learning settings are critical spaces for advancing inclusion because they often serve populations who have been marginalized or underserved by formal education systems. These include out-of-school youth, women, rural learners, working adults, refugees, and persons with disabilities. Non-formal education is typically flexible, participatory, and rooted in community needs, making it an important context for nurturing emotional literacy (Rogers, 2014).

Unlike formal schooling, non-formal learning often emphasizes dialogue, collaboration, and experiential learning, all of which require emotional competencies to thrive. Emotional literacy equips learners in these spaces with the capacity to negotiate difference, manage conflict, and build solidarity across diverse groups. For facilitators, it enables relational approaches that sustain learner engagement, especially in settings where participants may carry experiences of trauma, exclusion, or educational failure (Brookfield, 2013).

Adult education programmes across the world highlight the transformative potential of emotional literacy. Freire's (1970/2018) pedagogy of the oppressed emphasized the affective as well as cognitive dimensions of conscientization. Adult learners are often motivated by goals beyond credentialing - such as empowerment, personal growth, and community engagement which are deeply tied to emotional experiences. For example, adult literacy programmes in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have found that incorporating emotional literacy components - such as storytelling, reflective sharing, and group discussions enhance learner persistence and reduces dropout rates (Singh, 2017). Similarly, lifelong learning initiatives in Europe emphasize social cohesion, with emotional literacy framed as a "life skill" for democratic participation (Jarvis, 2009).



Community learning centres (CLCs), often established in local neighbourhoods, function as hubs for lifelong learning. UNESCO (2017) identifies CLCs as vital in promoting social inclusion, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Emotional literacy contributes by fostering trust, empathy, and communication among diverse participants.

Case studies from community education in Japan, Bangladesh, and Uganda demonstrate how emotional literacy practices - such as collaborative art, peer mentoring, and intergenerational dialogue strengthen community bonds (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2017). For instance, in Bangladesh, CLCs that integrate socio-emotional learning have been able to re-engage adolescent girls who dropped out of school due to early marriage or poverty, creating safe spaces where emotions are validated and aspirations reignited (Ahmed & Nath, 2016).

One of the most compelling contributions of emotional literacy in community-based learning lies in its ability to re-engage learners who have experienced exclusion. Marginalization often produces emotional scars - shame, fear, or low self-efficacy that hinder re-entry into learning environments. Facilitators who model emotional literacy can help learners overcome these barriers by building psychological safety and affirming learners' dignity. For example, in refugee education programmes in Europe, emotional literacy interventions have been used to help learners process trauma and rebuild social trust (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). In indigenous education initiatives in Australia, integrating cultural storytelling and emotional reflection has supported the healing of historical trauma while also strengthening intergenerational learning (Atkinson, 2002). With the expansion of digital technologies, community-based learning increasingly incorporates online and blended formats. While digital platforms offer flexibility, they also risk emotional disconnection due to reduced face-to-face interaction. Facilitators therefore require emotional literacy to humanize digital learning environments (Salmon, 2013).

Research on online community learning platforms shows that when facilitators explicitly acknowledge emotions, encourage empathy, and use reflective prompts, learners report higher levels of engagement and belonging (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Digital literacy and emotional literacy thus intersect, ensuring that technological innovation does not undermine but instead enhances inclusivity. Across diverse contexts, several practices have been identified as effective for embedding emotional literacy in non-formal and community learning:

- Storytelling and Narrative Sharing – Encourages learners to articulate personal experiences, building both self-awareness and empathy across diverse groups (Egan, 1999).
- Peer Mentoring and Support Groups – Foster interpersonal communication and collective problem-solving, particularly valuable in adult literacy and women's empowerment programmes.
- Arts-Based Learning – Activities like theatre, music, and visual arts help learners explore and express emotions creatively, supporting both healing and solidarity (Boal, 2000).
- Circle Time and Dialogue Circles – Provide structured opportunities for reflective dialogue, promoting inclusion and trust in group settings (Roffey, 2015).
- Community Service Learning – Engages learners in collaborative projects that build both civic responsibility and emotional connectedness to others (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

These strategies demonstrate that emotional literacy is not an abstract concept but a practical toolkit that strengthens participation, engagement, and belonging in community learning contexts.

Despite its promise, integrating emotional literacy into community-based education faces challenges:

- **Resource Limitations:** Many CLCs in low-income contexts operate with minimal funding, limiting the ability to provide facilitator training in emotional literacy (UIL, 2017).
- **Cultural Variability:** Concepts of emotional expression and regulation vary across cultures; emotional literacy frameworks risk imposing Western norms if not adapted sensitively (Hofstede, 2001).
- **Measurement Difficulties:** Assessing outcomes of emotional literacy in community learning is complex, as impacts are often long-term and qualitative.
- **Policy Neglect:** Non-formal education often receives less policy attention than formal schooling, leaving emotional literacy initiatives under-supported (Rogers, 2014).

Addressing these challenges requires policy commitment, local adaptation, and cross-sectoral partnerships.

### **Intersections with Lifelong Learning and Sustainability Goals**

Lifelong learning is increasingly recognized as essential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not only for employability but also for democratic citizenship, social well-being, and sustainable development. UNESCO's *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (UIL, 2019) positions lifelong learning as both a right and a necessity, especially in the face of rapid technological change, climate crises, and social inequalities.

Emotional literacy directly intersects with lifelong learning by equipping individuals with the emotional competencies to adapt, engage, and thrive across different life stages. Lifelong learners require resilience, empathy, and self-regulation to navigate transitions whether entering new forms of work, engaging in community action, or coping with uncertainty (Illeris, 2014). Without emotional literacy, lifelong learning risks becoming instrumental and narrow, rather than transformative. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 emphasizes "inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Emotional literacy is not explicitly mentioned in SDG 4 targets, but it underpins many of its indicators, especially those concerning inclusion, quality, and equity (United Nations, 2015). For instance:

- Target 4.5 calls for the elimination of disparities in education and equal access for vulnerable populations. Emotional literacy supports this by fostering empathy and respect for diversity in classrooms and communities.
- Target 4.7 focuses on education for sustainable development and global citizenship. Emotional literacy contributes by nurturing values of care, cooperation, and responsibility - key for sustainability and peace.

Thus, emotional literacy should be considered a *foundational enabler* of SDG 4, complementing cognitive and technical skills.

Sustainability is often approached in terms of environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Emotional literacy plays a particularly strong role in the social sustainability pillar, which emphasizes social cohesion, equity, and inclusion (Sterling, 2010). By cultivating empathy, compassion, and dialogue, emotional literacy enables communities to manage conflict, build trust, and engage in collective problem-solving - all essential for sustainable societies. For example, education for climate change adaptation requires not only scientific knowledge but also emotional resilience to cope with eco-anxiety and collective grief (Ojala, 2012). Community-based sustainability projects that incorporate reflective dialogue and emotional sharing often see stronger participation and commitment (Rieckmann, 2017).

The concept of *learning neighbourhoods* - local communities that provide lifelong learning opportunities has been championed by UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities. Emotional literacy supports such neighbourhoods by strengthening interpersonal trust, inclusive participation, and intergenerational solidarity.

Case studies from learning cities like Cork (Ireland) and Medellín (Colombia) highlight how community dialogues, intergenerational projects, and arts-based learning initiatives embed emotional literacy into local sustainable development strategies (UIL, 2017). These initiatives show that sustainable neighbourhoods are not only about infrastructure or access to learning but also about nurturing emotionally intelligent communities. Several policy frameworks already recognize the importance of emotional and social learning, though not always under the label "emotional literacy." For example:

The OECD's Learning Compass 2030 identifies social and emotional skills as central to learner well-being and global competence (OECD, 2019).

The EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning include "personal, social and learning competence," which resonates with emotional literacy dimensions (European Commission, 2018).

UNESCO's *Reimagining Our Futures Together* (2021) underscores the need for education that integrates care, empathy, and solidarity as essential to building a sustainable future.

Despite these frameworks, emotional literacy often remains at the margins of policy implementation, overshadowed by measurable academic outcomes. Embedding emotional literacy explicitly into lifelong learning policy would strengthen efforts toward inclusive and sustainable development.

### **Barriers and Gaps in Knowledge and Practice**

Despite widespread recognition of its importance, the systematic integration of emotional literacy into lifelong learning and sustainability agendas remains limited. Several barriers continue to constrain its adoption:

- **Lack of Recognition:** Emotional literacy is still often dismissed as a "soft skill," resulting in insufficient policy attention and limited funding support (Roffey, 2020).
- **Conceptual Ambiguity:** The term is frequently conflated with emotional intelligence, socio-emotional learning, or affective pedagogy, leading to fragmented application in classrooms and uneven policy uptake. Without clarity, education systems struggle to prioritize or evaluate emotional literacy meaningfully.
- **Measurement Challenges:** Emotional competencies are relational and context-dependent, making them harder to quantify than literacy or numeracy. Standardized tools risk oversimplifying, while the absence of nuanced indicators undermines policy-level impact.
- **Cultural and Contextual Variability:** Expressions of empathy, care, and emotional regulation differ significantly across cultures. Frameworks rooted in Western psychology may not resonate with indigenous, collectivist, or non-Western contexts, requiring adaptation to local realities (Hofstede, 2001).
- **Resource Inequalities:** In low-income or resource-constrained settings, urgent priorities such as basic literacy, infrastructure, and teacher shortages often overshadow efforts to embed emotional literacy.
- **Policy Marginalization:** Although global frameworks (e.g., OECD's Learning Compass, UNESCO's *Reimagining Our Futures Together*) recognize socio-emotional dimensions, these priorities are rarely translated into national curriculum frameworks, funding allocations, or monitoring systems.

Alongside these barriers, important knowledge gaps persist:



- A lack of longitudinal evidence on the sustained impact of emotional literacy on learner outcomes, resilience, or social cohesion.
- Research concentrated in formal schooling, with limited exploration of adult, vocational, or community-based learning spaces.
- Insufficient intersectional perspectives, neglecting how emotional literacy interacts with gender, disability, socio-economic status, and migration.
- A scarcity of scalable models, especially in culturally diverse or resource-constrained contexts, where pilots often show promise but lack replication at scale.

### **Strategic Recommendations**

To address these barriers and close existing gaps, a multi-level approach is needed. This review identifies four interconnected directions for action:

- **Pedagogical Practice** - Foster relational pedagogy that prioritizes dialogue, empathy, and emotional safety in classrooms; employ culturally responsive frameworks, integrating indigenous knowledge systems and collective practices; and integrate emotional and cognitive domains within curricula so emotional literacy complements academic and vocational skills rather than being side-lined.
- **Professional Development** - Provide sustained training for educators in self-awareness, reflective practice, and trauma-informed approaches, enabling them to model emotional literacy; and establish peer networks and communities of practice where educators can share experiences, challenges, and innovations, embedding emotional literacy into professional culture.
- **Policy Directions** - Mainstream emotional literacy into national lifelong learning strategies, explicitly linking it to SDG 4 targets and monitoring frameworks; ensure dedicated funding streams to support training, community initiatives, and robust evaluation; and promote cross-sector collaboration among schools, NGOs, health providers, and community organizations to create holistic ecosystems of support.
- **Research Priorities** - Invest in longitudinal and comparative studies that examine emotional literacy's role in learning and sustainability over time; use participatory methods to centre learners' voices in shaping definitions and practices; and develop mixed-method evaluation tools that capture both relational depth and measurable outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

Emotional literacy must be understood not as an optional add-on or a peripheral “soft skill,” but as a core dimension of transformative education. Its value lies in equipping both learners and educators with relational, empathetic, and reflective capacities that are indispensable for meaningful learning and collective well-being. By cultivating these competencies, education systems can move beyond narrow measures of cognitive achievement and foster environments where learners feel safe, valued, and connected. Such environments are not only conducive to academic success but also to the nurturing of democratic participation, resilience, and social responsibility. Looking forward, emotional literacy should be recognised as a strategic enabler of lifelong learning and sustainable development. In lifelong learning contexts, it supports learners of all ages to continuously adapt, engage, and thrive amid shifting personal, professional, and societal demands. In sustainability contexts, it strengthens the social fabric by fostering empathy, solidarity, and cooperation - qualities critical for addressing complex challenges that extend beyond national borders. Embedding emotional literacy into pedagogy, policy, professional development, and research offers a pathway to bridge the gap between personal growth and societal sustainability.

The urgency of this integration is underscored by the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Climate change, forced migration, rising inequality, and rapid digital transformation expose individuals and communities to unprecedented levels of uncertainty and disruption. In such contexts, technical knowledge alone is insufficient. Learners require emotional competencies that enable them to navigate complexity, embrace diversity, manage conflict constructively, and sustain collective well-being. Emotional literacy thus becomes both a shield against alienation and a catalyst for collaborative problem-solving in times of crisis. For education systems, the integration of emotional literacy presents an opportunity to redefine success. Beyond preparing individuals for employment, schools, universities, and community learning centres can cultivate emotionally intelligent learners and citizens capable of contributing to inclusive, cohesive, and environmentally responsible societies. By doing so, they directly advance the ambitions of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that quality education is not only accessible but also transformative. Ultimately, embedding emotional literacy at the heart of education represents a profound shift: from viewing emotions as peripheral to recognising them as central to human flourishing. By acknowledging and harnessing the emotional dimensions of learning, education can become a force that nurtures adaptive, compassionate, and resilient individuals - people who are prepared not only to survive but also to lead in uncertain futures.

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