

Book Reviews

The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School

by Rachael Kessler

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000

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Reviewed by
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With the perspective gained from years of working with children and teachers in public and private

schools, Rachel Kessler

writes that our students do not leave their emotions at the door as they enter school. According to the author, to deny that students have souls implies that modern schooling is soulless, and that to agree with it provokes profound questions about the nature of the human spirit.

These are the questions Kessler addresses thoughtfully through the compelling stories she has collected from dozens of students in classrooms around the country. She also describes her mission to create curriculum, strategies and teacher development to feed the spirits of children within a school setting. She accomplishes this with a deep respect for the religious, as well as the non-religious, diversity in our society.

Kessler describes a pattern she calls "The Seven Gateways to the Soul of Education" that emerges from the stories, questions and wisdom expressed by high school students in a program designed as a rite of passage from

adolescence to adulthood. The book is organized around chapters describing these gateways: deep connection; silence and solitude; meaning and purpose; joy; creativity; transcendence; and initiation. While the stories emerge primarily from high school students, the implications are

standard for every classroom.

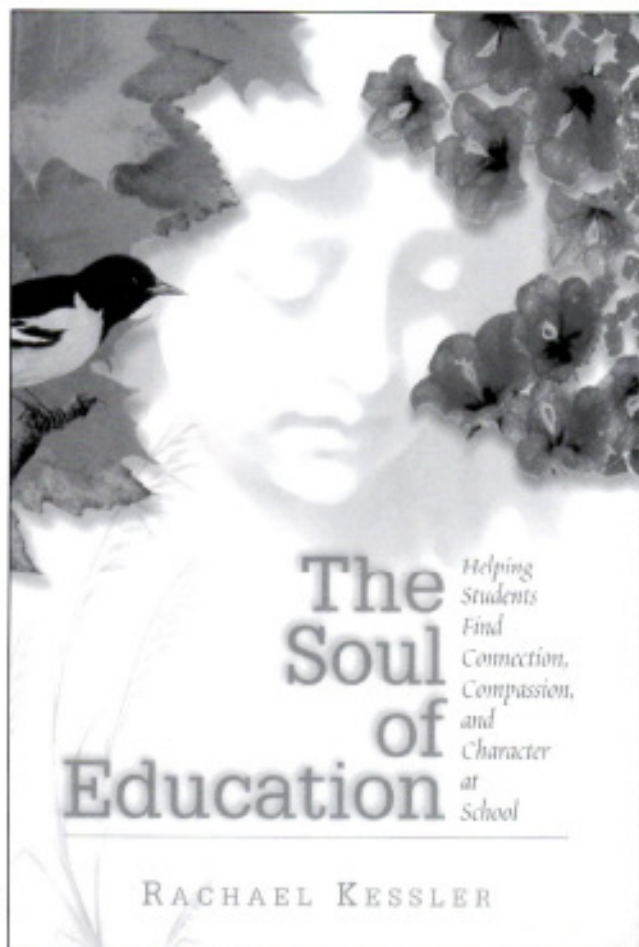
Teachers of music and dance have the special privilege of glimpsing the souls of students as they delight in the joy found in our classrooms. In her chapter on joy, Kessler suggests a variety of activities to stir joy in children. These could be descriptive of

the Orff Schulwerk: "... teach through play, invite humor, create lessons that awaken the senses and engage the body, [and] foster moments of heartfelt connection within the group" (p.75-76).

In the same chapter she reminds teachers that we need to nurture our own souls: "What we do not see in ourselves we may project onto our students and colleagues ..." (p. 83).

In her chapter on creativity Kessler warns, "our own creativity - and that of our students - may be at odds with the best of plans" (p. 100). She reminds us to value openness and surprise, qualities that lie at the heart of the creative process, both in music and in life.

This book is an excellent starting point for teaching emotional literacy to our students. It is worthy of careful reading by all teachers. I hope it will lead to new directions in our conversations about education reform.



not limited to adolescents. The climate of safety, caring and respect she describes is worthy of being held as a