Teachers are busy people and often have the ‘busy-ness’ of their workplace erode good intentions to probe more widely or deeply in certain areas of their professional reading. Long-winded or overly academic writing is not immediately translated to useful application in the classroom because of the concentration required to unlock the careful and thorough research in these types of publications. Leyden and Shale’s book is different in that it has a simple fluency unencumbered by the patronising style that over simplification can produce. The authors aim to provide practical classroom strategies for teachers to support diverse student needs, including indicators that children may exhibit if suffering from conditions such as anxiety or eating disorders. They write as if they respect the experience their audience brings to the book, covering a number of different aspects of the social and emotional development of children from age 5 through to 12 and over. This may seem to suggest it is aimed only at primary and early middle-years teachers but, having taught in these areas as well as all the way to Year 12, I am confident the information covered is just as relevant as a series of basic reminders for teachers of senior students as well.

The aspect of the book I most enjoyed were the ‘takeaways’, the strategies offered to deal with issues such as: building resilience, dealing with grief, supporting angry and aggressive children, bullying and developing independence to name but a few. Usually these were common sense truisms most of us would know from our general experience anyway. From time to time there were some good ideas I had not previously heard and it is the presence of these nuggets of wisdom that experienced teachers seek from such books to act as an extra tool for their kitbag. Leyden and Shale also demonstrate an effort to provide research support to a number of their points which can offer a pathway to deeper understanding, should the reader be inclined to pursue it. I also enjoyed the sampling of professional opinions and anecdotes which appear as italicised excerpts within the text.

While I was pleased to see specific sections devoted to discussion of ADHD and ASD children, I felt there could have been some reference to the way that the rest of the class can be assisted to adapt to the presence of a child with these unique issues. There is a short ‘anecdotal’ on this but a list of strategy points as provided in other sections of the book may have been a useful addition by extension here. The irony is that the social and emotional development of children thus afflicted can be further stymied when their peers ostracise or exclude these students because they do not fully understand their issues. A teacher who enlists the effort of the rest of the class in understanding and developing a tolerance for the quirks of an ADHD or ASD classmate can go some way to minimising the negative impacts of that condition on the collective class as well as the individual in my experience.

Overall, I would recommend this book to all teachers from prep to senior because it is always useful to remind ourselves about the important position we have in influencing the lives and development of our students.

David Bell MACE