

TEACHER, KNOW THYSELF

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Abstract

Teachers know from their studies on how children learn that there are different types of intelligence. One child may put together an intricate puzzle in a few minutes, while a child who is a math whiz would not know where to begin. In recent years, educators (especially Goleman, etc.) have begun to realize that there is yet another type of “intelligence” that teachers should understand: emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional Intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. Teachers should be aware of the significance of EI in themselves, in their students, and in the dynamics of their classroom. The title, “Teacher, Know Thyself,” stresses that teachers should be aware of their own EI in order for them to help their students reach a high level of emotional growth.

What is intelligence? Typically, the definition of intelligence has focused on analytic reasoning, verbal skills, spatial ability, attention, memory, and judgment. There has been a murky concept with definitions by many experts. For example, one definition is that individuals differ from one another in their ability to understand complex ideas, to adapt effectively to the environment, to learn from experience, to engage in various forms of reasoning, and to overcome obstacles by using thought. According to Neisser (1996), concepts of intelligence are attempts to clarify and organize this complex set of phenomena. IQ can be a weak predictor for achievement, job performance success, and overall success, wealth, and happiness. It accounts for a major component of employment success according to numbers of studies covering career success, maybe as much as 20-25%. However, there are more potent predictors of career success such as an ability to handle frustrations, manage one’s own emotions, and manage one’s own social skills. Studies have found that there are people who are highly intelligent but who are not socially adept.

Which brings us to the question, how important is emotional intelligence? This intelligence has been around for years, but only brought to the forefront in the past couple of decades. First of all, how do we view emotions? In the 1940’s they were viewed as chaotic, haphazard, superfluous, incompatible with reason, disorganized, and largely visceral, all resulting from the lack of effective adjustment. Goleman (1995) reports the historical perspective on emotional intelligence actually began with social intelligence by Thorndike (1920) who proposed that social intelligence is the ability to understand others and “act wisely in human relations.” L. J. Cronbach (1960) stated in his *Essential of Psychological Testing* that the intelligence tests portrayed social intelligence as a “useless concept.” Robert Sternberg (1985) concluded in his book *Beyond IQ* that “social intelligence is both distinct from academic abilities and a key part of what makes people do well in the practicalities of life.” In other words, in the workplace, social intelligence enables the type of sensitivity that allows managers to pick up on subtle messages from employees. Howard Gardner (1985) in his work on multiple intelligences, asserted that understanding oneself and others and the ability to use that understanding is a type of intelligence. Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, according to Gardner, provide ways of knowing that are valuable life skills. Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) first proposed a model of emotional intelligence in their book, *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*. Then in 1995 Daniel Goleman’s book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* was published.

It is with this publication that emotional intelligence actually began to play a part on the psychological stage. More recently emotions have been viewed in a different light. Emotions can arouse, sustain, or even direct activity. They are part of the total economy of living organisms, not necessarily in opposition to intelligence or IQ. Some have even perceived emotions as a higher order of intelligence. And others have thought emotional processing to be an essential part of rational decision making. When we try to get at emotion, we must go deep into the brain, into the amygdala. According to Goleman (1995) the amygdala in the brain is the “seat of passion.” As an example of how the amygdala works, Goleman (1995) said that “the emotional brain scans everything happening to us from moment to moment, to see if something that happened in the past that made us sad or angry is like what is happening now.” If so, the amygdala sounds an alarm—to declare an emergency and mobilize in a split second to act. And it can do so in brain time, more rapidly than the thinking brain takes to figure out what is going on, which is why people can get into a rage and do something very inappropriate that they wished they had not done. Goleman calls this “emotional hijacking.” The main purpose of the innermost part of the brain is survival. There is a biological purpose for emotion. One is to signal function or to provide a strong impulse to action. Another is to promote unique, stereotypical patterns of physiological changes.

Basic emotions are presumed to be hard-wired and physiologically distinctive. These emotions would be joy, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear. We have found there is an evolutionary advantage to emotions, such as the fight or flight response. However the question arises, can basic emotions like the ones listed above overwhelm rational thinking? Damasio’s (1995) work shows how neurobiology can help us understand the role of emotion in thinking. We are constantly learning more about this important area. Work like Damasio’s underlies the concepts of emotional intelligence. Although there are less obvious advantages to emotional experience, emotion is emerging as an essential contributor to rational decision making.

Therefore, we ask the question, What is Emotional Intelligence? And what importance does it have for the classroom teacher, the college professor, the student in either school or life itself? First, we can define emotional intelligence as the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relations. Emotional intelligence is a field in infancy, but one that is fast-growing. According to Mayer (1992), there are distinctive styles for attending to and dealing with emotions. There are “self-aware,” “engulfed,” and “accepting.” Self-aware personalities in regard to emotions are often autonomous and know their boundaries, have a positive outlook on life, and their mindfulness helps them to manage their emotions. Engulfed are personalities who feel overwhelmed by their emotions and helpless to escape or to deal properly with them. These people are often mercurial and often lost in their emotions. They feel they have little control over their emotional lives. Accepting personalities generally accept their feelings and moods. These people are usually in a good mood and who, despite their clarity about their moods, can actually fall into bad moods but are able to accept them and move on.

According to Goleman (1995), there are five categories of Emotional Intelligence. These five categories are self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness, and social skills. First, let’s look at emotional self-awareness. It is the ability to notice our true feelings. People who have greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives. They also have a surer sense about how they feel about personal decisions. Strong feelings or lack of awareness of feelings can become an overwhelming area of life. Self-awareness is fundamental to psychological insight. Freud showed us how much of emotional life is unconscious: feelings we have within us don’t often cross the threshold into awareness. Emotions that simmer beneath the threshold of awareness can have a powerful impact on how we perceive and react to them. The goal is balance, not emotional suppression. What we need is appropriate emotion, feeling proportionate to circumstances. The key to emotional well-being is keeping our distressing emotions in check. Ups and downs are part of life, but need to be in balance.

Second, there is emotional self-regulation. Because we are not good at influencing whether a particular emotion will arise, Emotional Intelligence tells us something is happening but there is individual variability in the degree to which we can consciously limit the duration of unpleasant emotions and the degree of influence over the behaviors which may arise. Without self-regulation, emotions can get out of control and impair our reasoning ability. It can also increase the likelihood that chronic emotional problems will result such as anxiety or depression. According to Diane Tice (1993), of all the moods people want to escape, rage seems to be the most intransigent: people have most trouble controlling anger. Many people believe that anger is uncontrollable or it should not be controlled and venting anger in “catharsis” is good. Brooding fuels anger’s flames.

Tice found that reframing a situation more positively was one of the best ways to put anger to rest. Many things can trigger anger: an outright physical threat or a symbolic threat to self-esteem, being treated unjustly, and being insulted can all result in anger. One way to diffuse anger is to seize on and challenge the thoughts that trigger the surges of anger. Another way to de-escalate anger is to have a cooling off physiologically by seeking distractions. Active exercise can also help with anger. Psychologists have found that catharsis—giving vent to rage—does little to dispel it. Students who are anxious, angry, or depressed do not learn. Emotions can overwhelm concentration. They can get in the way of how we think and plan, pursue training for a distant goal, solve problems, and determine how we do in life in general.

Being able to manage emotions in someone else is the core of the art of handling relationships. It requires the maturity of two other emotional skills, self-management and empathy. Paul Ekman (1975) uses the term “display rules” for social consensus about which feelings can be properly shown and when. One display rule is minimizing the show of emotion—an example is the Japanese norm for feelings of distress in the presence of someone in authority. A second display rule is exaggerating what one feels by magnifying the emotional experience. A third display rule is substituting one feeling for another. Emotional displays have immediate consequences in the impact that they make on the person who receives them.

Third, there is the category of self-motivation. We can use emotions to maximize intellectual processing and decision making. As a person matures, emotions begin to shape and improve thinking by directing a person’s attention to important changes. We can actually be motivated to set goals and work towards making those goals become reality.

Fourth, Emotional Intelligence has the category of empathy. Empathy builds self-awareness: the more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading others’ feelings. Empathy is the capacity to know how another feels, to be able to read nonverbal clues, tone of voice, gesture, and facial expression. One rule of thumb in communications research is that 90 percent or more of an emotional message is nonverbal. Empathy actually begins at infancy. Infants are upset when they hear another infant crying, perhaps a precursor to empathy. John Donne’s words, “Never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee” definitely illustrate the link between empathy and caring: another’s pain is one’s own. Martin Hoffman (1984) argues that the roots of morality are to be found in empathy. The same capacity for empathetic effect, for putting oneself in another’s place, leads people to follow certain moral principles.

Does everyone have empathy? Or can we develop empathy? The answer to both questions can be “yes.” With empathy comes greater emotional stability, greater interpersonal sensitivity, and better school performance. How do we develop social relationships and even begin to manage emotions in others? To excel at people skills means having and using the competencies to be an effective friend, negotiator, or leader. One should be able to guide an interaction, inspire others, make others comfortable, and influence and persuade. These are all things that teachers, professors, and students do each day. People skills are needed to be successful in many jobs. We must be attuned to others’ emotions, promote comfort in others through the proper use of display rules, and use emotional display to establish a sense of rapport. The “nice personality” should not be confused with emotional intelligence. Charisma draws in but not always to desired ends, for example Hitler and Jim Jones. We must remember that empathy can be faked as can other emotions.

And finally, social skills is another category of emotional intelligence. First, we must develop external strategies and then social strategies. For example girls do better at developing strategies overall than boys. The more strategies we can develop and utilize the better. Sometimes our “gut feeling” can be used to effectively guide decisions. This is a neurological understanding of how unconscious and conscious gut feelings guide decisions, when we are prioritizing, for example. We can harness emotions to promote or hinder motivation, thus anxiety, hostility, enthusiasm, and excitement. We can use emotional swings to increase the accuracy of our own perspectives of future events.

So, how do we develop Emotional Intelligence? In the beginning, a genetic contribution is likely present. We are not destined by what Emotional Intelligence we develop; we can always develop more. One way that most people learn about Emotional Intelligence is from their parents. However, in the family where there is abuse, physical or mental, Emotional Intelligence can be hindered. If we have poor Emotional Intelligence, we may not be able to read others’ emotions which may lead to the development of poor social skills. Males are more willing to compromise social connectedness for independence.

They are not as good as females at Emotional Intelligence. Females, on the other hand, have a greater need for connectedness, have a wider range of emotions, are better at reading emotions and developing strategies to deal with these emotions than males. There are some emotion-related dysfunctions that can occur. One who practices all or nothing thinking may have EI difficulties. Also overgeneralizations, excessive worrying, jumping to negative conclusions, using “should” statements, labeling and mislabeling, stonewalling, and criticism can create EI dysfunctions. These behaviors can impact on our physical health (cardiovascular disease, progression of cancer, onset of hypertension just to mention a few). They can also impact our relationships and our mental health as well. They can affect how we do our work.

Emotional Intelligence is important not only in schools and in life in general, but also in the places where we work. The more education we get and the higher positions we have in companies, the more Emotional Intelligence we need. The higher we get in companies, the more we have to deal with influence, communication, leadership, change, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration, and team capabilities. Fifty percent of work satisfaction is determined by the relationship a worker has with his/her boss. EI is a prerequisite for effective leadership across borders. Leadership requires a high level of self-mastery and people skills. It requires the ability to put oneself into the positions of others.

So how do we develop Emotional Intelligence? Will a one-day seminar help us to unlearn old habits? What is training in Emotional Intelligence worth? Can it increase retention, decrease absenteeism, and increase overall organizational growth. It could actually increase production as much as 20%. Goleman (1995) gives us nine strategies for developing and promoting emotional intelligence in the classroom, on the job, in life: 1) taking the time for mindfulness; 2) recognizing and naming emotions; 3) understanding the causes of feelings; 4) differentiating between emotion and the need to take action; 5) preventing depression through “learned optimism;” 6) managing anger through learned behavior or distraction techniques; 7) listening for the lessons of feelings; 8) using “gut feelings” in decision making; and 9) developing listening skills are some helpful strategies to develop Emotional Intelligence.

So, “Teacher, Know Thyself” isn’t just a popular saying. If more teachers had more Emotional Intelligence and helped their students to acquire more strategies for Emotional Intelligence, the world presently as well as in the future would be better predisposed to being happier and more productive in life.

Suggestions for Further Inquiry:

1. Develop an emotional intelligence kit for kids.
2. Reach out into the community and find what is available on emotional intelligence.
3. Share your personal knowledge of emotional intelligence.
4. Produce an exhibition of emotional intelligence.
5. Do action research with individuals in classrooms.
6. Peer coaching on emotional intelligence.

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Appendix A

Possible Contacts for more information on Emotional Intelligence

Child Development Project
Developmental Studies Center
2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305
Oakland, CA 94606-5300

North Country School
P. O. Box 187
Lake Placid, NY 12946-0187

PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) Program
Prevention Research Center
Pennsylvania State University
Henderson Building South
University Park, PA 16802

Primary Mental Health Project, Inc. (PMHP)
575 Mount Hope Avenue
Rochester, NY 14620-2290

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)
RCCP National Center
163 Third Avenue, #103
New York, NY 10003

The Responsive Classroom
Northeast Foundation for Children
71 Montague City Road
Greenfield, MA 01301

School Development Program (SDP)
Yale Child Study Center
55 College Street, Dept. A
New Haven, CT 06510

Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum
The Committee for Children
2203 Airport Way South, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98134-2027

Social Decision Making and Problem Solving
Department of Psychology
Rutgers University, Livingston Campus
New Brunswick, NJ 08903

Social Development Research Group (SDRG)
Raising Healthy Children Program
9732 Third Avenue NE
Suite 401
Seattle, WA 98115

Success for Life
LaSalle Academy
612 Academy Avenue
Providence, RI 02908