

Fact-File 22: EI at School...

Why it's every teacher's business.



Extracts from our Guide on EI at School: Enhancing School Life and Learning through Emotional Intelligence

Emotions: A Missing Link in Learning?

There's an emotional revolution going on that stems from a recognition that emotions do, after all, play a central part in all human endeavour.



And nowhere is the notion of *Emotional Intelligence* – or EI, more crucial than in our schools.

We're not just talking a new subject area here. A crucial life-skill like EI is too important to be sidelined in a small part of the curriculum – especially when it's a pre-condition behind successful learning itself, not to mention:

- ❑ the formation of self-identify, confidence-building, resilience and social integration
- ❑ health, spiritual, moral, cultural, team and leadership development
- ❑ self-discipline, self-responsibility, behaviour management, decision-making etc

'Successful learning is a combination of feeling, thinking and doing. What we feel determines not only what we think, but how we think... The control centre of learning is our emotions. They are the enablers and paradoxically the constrictors of what and how we learn.'

Michael Brearley, *EI in the Classroom* p.iv

There's no doubt emotions have a huge impact on learning success and school life – both for teachers and students alike. While no-one yet completely understands the connection between emotions and successful learning, most teachers would agree that:

- ❑ Students learn best when they feel good about themselves, feel good about being in the classroom and get along well with others.
- ❑ The ability to create such positive emotional classroom climates is intimately linked to their own level of 'emotional literacy'

Emotions or moods at work may seem trivial from a strictly administrative or pedagogical viewpoint, but they have a real impact in terms of getting work done well, relating well to students, bosses and colleagues you work with and creating an emotionally positive learning climate for teachers and students alike.

If learning is emotion-based, then engaging students means involving them emotionally with what they're learning.

The more emotional connection there is in a school, the more students and staff feel friendly, happy, enthused, interested, focused – and morale tends to be high. The reverse applies too. Emotionally remote or critical teachers and staff lead to apathy, fear, withdrawal, lack of focus – and morale tends to be lower.

"Learning doesn't take place in isolation from kid's feelings. Being emotionally literate is as important for learning as instruction in maths and reading... Our kids learn that you always have choices about how you respond to emotion, and the more ways you know to respond to an emotion, the richer your life can be." Karen Stone
McCown Developer of *The Self-Science Curriculum*

Unsurprisingly, research into memory retention reveals we store and recall things better when learning is associated with positive emotional experiences.

Classrooms in Crisis

Classrooms are in crisis. We point to successes, but underachievement is also endemic.

- ❑ Fewer kids are becoming the brilliant learners they could be. Learning difficulties abound.
- ❑ Fewer schools seem able to consistently instil that love of learning we'd all like to see in kids.
- ❑ More children say how disappointed, bored, disenchanted, despondent, de-motivated or frustrated they are with school.

Toxic emotional states like these are clogging-up learning climates in our classrooms in alarming ways. Yet conversely, in classrooms where real progress is being made, more positive emotions tend to be present in both teachers and pupils.

As recent research reveals, EI has a lot to do with raising levels of achievement, joy, motivation, optimism, focus and purpose – which impact both staff and student performance – and decreasing dysfunctional behaviour, depression, fear, anxiety and a host of other learning drawbacks.

So while traditionalists may complain of the need to revert to the *good old 3 R's*, they fail to see how the *3 A's* need fixing first: Anger, Anxiety and

Fact-File 22: EI at School...

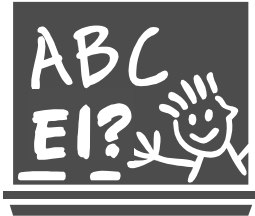
Why it's every teacher's business.



Extracts from our Guide on EI at School: Enhancing School Life and Learning through Emotional Intelligence

Apathy. Or, if that's not good enough, how about a remedy for the 3 D's: Despair, Despondency, De-motivation?

What is Emotional Intelligence?



EI is a set of brain-based competencies we all learn to some extent, which help regulate our own emotions, read emotions in others and act in ways that help us empathise, connect and relate – as well as understand what's going on for us feeling-wise. We've all witnessed EI in action:

- ❑ There's the person we envy who just seems to get along so naturally with everyone.
- ❑ There's the teacher who builds strong bonds effortlessly with pupils and gets them fired up with learning enthusiasm.
- ❑ There's the manager who can bear bad news but get away with it unscathed – because people trust they're genuine.
- ❑ There's the nurse who instinctively knows what to say to put a patient at ease or settle their anxiety.
- ❑ There's the waiter who confidently handles difficult diners that'd make most of us tear our hair out – and manages to send them away smiling and feeling special.

➔ What all these people have in common is **Emotional Intelligence**. EI is...

- ❑ The ability to recognise, connect with and use feelings to more effectively handle our own emotions and get positive outcomes in relationships with others.
- ❑ What helps some of us cope better with frustration, control emotional outbursts and get along with others. Its absence brings on irritation and negativity and poisons relationships.
- ❑ A set of emotional capabilities related to the way we manage and act on our emotions
- ❑ A brain-based process that shapes our interactions with others as well as our understanding of ourselves.

Schooling the Emotions

? Can EI competencies really be taught in schools – and should they be?

Whether we know it or not, family and school are where we learn our first emotional lessons. Brain-based research says we all more easily learn emotional skills in our formative years. The amygdala – that part of our brain that handles feelings - takes at least 16 years to mature.

'The habits of emotional management that are repeated over and over again during childhood and the teenage years mould our emotional circuitry. This makes childhood a crucial window of opportunity for shaping lifelong emotional propensities; habits acquired in childhood become set in the basic synaptic wiring of neural architecture, and are harder to change later in life.' Daniel Goleman *EI: Why it Matters* p. 226

This means EI is best learned during this period. It also means teachers are in a prime position to influence the crucial emotional lessons children learn in their early life.

Similar research also shows positive emotional patterns can be learned - just like language, music or maths. In fact, emotional patterns can actually be unlearned and re-learned at any stage in our lives, though of course the more ingrained our neuronal pathways are, the harder this is.

'Emotional life is a domain that, as surely as maths or reading, can be handled with greater or lesser skill, and requires its unique set of competencies.' Dan Goleman *EI: Why it matters more than IQ* p 36

➔ Here's a set of EI competencies some schools are already working with...

1. Emotional Self-Awareness:

- Can recognise and describe own feelings
- Can put a name to feelings accurately
- Can express a variety of feelings
- Can relate feelings to thoughts and actions

2. Empathy:

- Can connect with how others feel
- Can read non-verbal cues in others
- Can understand why people feel like they do
- Inquires about how others feel

Fact-File 22: EI at School...

Why it's every teacher's business.



Extracts from our Guide on EI at School: Enhancing School Life and Learning through Emotional Intelligence

3. Emotional Self-Management:

- Sees emotions as manageable, not uncontrollable
- Understands the idea of emotional hijacks
- Names things that make us happy/unhappy
- Can identify positive and negative thoughts
- Can identify triggers for anger and has ways of dealing with anger, fear, anxiety and sadness

4. Connecting with Others:

- Can make and keep close relationships
- Can express concerns to others without anger
- Can identify supportive people they know
- Can join in with others and have fun
- Can give compliments/appreciation to others

5. Emotional Learning:

- Can focus and concentrate on given tasks
- Can get into flow to persevere with something
- Learns from mistakes and sees them positively
- Identifies ways they learn best and uses these
- Develops own learning goals and action plans

Challenges to Emotional Learning

While EI can be taught, teaching it runs counter to a couple of our conventional concepts and common experiences of school-based learning.

1. For a start, emotions don't get that much of a look-in in schools – apart from an often non-systemic focus on managing bad behaviour.

Beyond early primary, it's the cognitive skills (reading, writing, numbering) and those solid, assessable subjects that get most attention. The biggest challenge to getting EI into classrooms is remembering to put a priority on *emotional schooling* in the midst of subject-fixation.

"With the curriculum already besieged by a proliferation of new topics and agendas, some teachers who understandably feel overburdened resist taking extra time from the basics for yet another course. So an emerging strategy in emotional education is not to create a new class, but to blend lessons on feelings and relationships with other topics already taught."
Dan Goleman EI: Why it matters more than IQ p. 271

2. Many teachers argue the curriculum is already jam-packed – the last thing they need is another subject. Nor would many EI proponents agree it be 'syllabised' into just another subject taught with the same level of torpor as students respond to other 'subjects'.

3. A key concern in conventional classroom teaching is on managing, controlling and directing students. With EI, teachers take on more of a "learning facilitator" role, adopting classroom management processes that are collaborative and inclusive and which challenges prevailing mental models of the control locus in classrooms

4. Traditional teaching centres on what teachers teach and how they teach it. Consciously or unconsciously, students experiment and mimic the behaviours they see teachers use. With EI, the emotional patterns that teachers demonstrate personally are paramount. This means managing their own emotions and taking time to mindfully model constructive emotional responses



5. For many kids, classrooms are scary places that invoke negative feelings. There are things teachers do – *or students* – that create enabling emotional states for learning while other emotions get in the way of learning. For example:

- When students feels frustrated, confused, bored, resigned to failure, foolish or unconfident or...
- Teachers feel insecure, angry, defeated, detached, remote, resigned or unchallenged...

...learning takes a backseat and is less effective. Creating a safe, inclusive climate is a precondition for emotional learning and most other forms of learning as well.

5. A teacher's level of EI is by far the single most important variable in creating emotionally intelligent classroom climates. And the single most important variable in the teacher's EI is how they handle their own emotions, especially negative ones.



Fact-File 22: EI at School...

Why it's every teacher's business.



Extracts from our Guide on EI at School: Enhancing School Life and Learning through Emotional Intelligence

Moods are infectious and this has immense implications for classrooms. Studies show the more resonance there is between teacher and students, the more students feel friendly, happy, enthused, interested and focused. The reverse applies too – an angry or critical teacher leads to apathy, fear, withdrawal, lack of focus, etc...

Finally, some people also say emotional learning is not a major responsibility of schools, but rather of parents. On the other hand, Daniel Goleman, the populariser of EI, cites research findings of alarming erosion of the emotional coaching and nourishing role of parents. If family life is faltering in providing positive emotional learning, teachers may be the last resort for emotional schooling and support.



Getting EI into the Classroom

To raise levels of learning, we need to target positive emotions and develop learning activities and strategies that are emotionally resonant and engaging.

➔ Here's a few things teachers can do to start integrating EI practices into their classrooms:

- ❑ **Build an emotional vocabulary.** If we don't have the right words or enough of them to label what we feel accurately, we can't name what we feel. We can't be rationally aware of our feelings. This makes us more at risk of emotional hijacks from frustration, rage, anger



'When we teach about anger, we help kids understand that it is almost always a secondary reaction and to look for what's underneath - are you hurt? jealous?' Karen Stone McCown, developer of *The Self-Science Curriculum*

- ❑ **Practise Expressing Feelings:** We naturally all have feelings, but being able to express them doesn't come so naturally. We have to learn how to acknowledge feelings – even bad ones – to express feelings without blaming or labelling, and to understand the

close connection between feelings and the thoughts that trigger them – all great lessons!

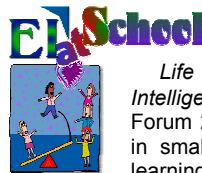
- ❑ **Use emotions as teaching themes:** Adopt key emotions such as anger and happiness or fear and excitement as emotional themes to explore over a term. Emotional exploration can be threaded through most subject areas: history, literature, SOCE and so on.
- ❑ **Teach Feeling Control:** Managing anger and other disruptive emotions (eg. *anxiety, apathy, self-loathing*) are core learning areas for the practice of emotional intelligence. Focus on feeling control either as a discreet set of skills to learn or as part of getting along in the classroom or team learning techniques.

Attending to the emotional climate and emotional schooling of students may still be largely an article of faith. However, if schools follow the same research trends emerging from business organisations – emotions impact heavily on productivity, team relationships, creativity, achievement and learning – and that's too important to ignore!

The Change Forum runs 1 or 2-day clinics for teachers who want to integrate emotional intelligence into their classroom approaches. For a full brochure on EI at School: Enhancing School Life and Learning through Emotional Intelligence...

☎: 07-4068 7591

💻: lcleadership@thechangeforum.com



This Fact-file is taken from our guide on *EI at School: Enhancing School Life and Learning through Emotional Intelligence* Copyright © Bill Cropper, The Change Forum 2005-2006. You are permitted to copy it in small quantities within your own school for learning exchange, provided this acknowledgement appears on all copies and any materials derived from it.