

Emotional Intelligence Part II: How to improve EI in the classroom



The human personality is composed of one's mental ability (Intelligence Quotient) as well as their emotional state (Emotional Intelligence). And both of those are influenced by what Mother Nature gave them in their DNA (height, eye color, complexion) as well as the effects of their current environmental situation. All of these play a vital role in describing who we are, but let's look closer and explore how teachers can help develop a student's emotional intelligence.

[Emotional Intelligence \(EI\)](#) is also known as [Emotional Quotient \(EQ\)](#), which is actually a test score to measure EI (Goleman, 2996). People with a high EQ use emotional information to guide their thinking and behavior. They can easily adjust their emotions to adapt to their environments when acquiring their goals. These individuals have the ability to manage their emotions and to use them to their benefit.

Having a heightened awareness of others' emotions, as well as being aware of their own feelings, gives the individual an advantage when working in a group. For teachers, for example, it allows them to gauge a student's mood and permits the instructor to carefully examine the classroom climate. Assessing the emotional elements in any situation, whether it is positive or negative, will help keep the students engaged and enable the teacher to better understand their behavior and current [mindset](#) (Goldstein, 2017).

Managing a student's emotional intelligence allows for greater outcomes. I've observed teachers read their student's emotional states, understand their reactions and stress levels and watched the instructors manage their classrooms with strategies and approaches that were very understanding and compassionate, thus producing incredible student achievement. So how do you improve the EQ of your students?

First, teach students to understand the vast variety of emotions:

Take time to discuss all types of emotions. [Paul Ekman](#), Psychologist from the University of California and the pioneer in the study of emotions, found that there were six major emotions; happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust and fear. For the little guys, an excellent resource is [Disney's/Pixar's movie, Inside Out](#). This movie illustrates not only the six major emotions, it is also a good introduction to the brain--- how we learn and store memories.

But there are many emotions such as annoyance, enthusiasm, nervousness, frustration, boredom, and impatience. Children need to understand these various emotions and learn how to read them in others. When they see their teachers and parents handle difficult situations, they learn how others cope and handle their emotions. They also learn from one another and watch their peers' reactions in the classroom as well as on the playground. Their antennae are always workingwhether it's conscious or unconscious observation.

Next, work on strategies to control their emotions:

“The basic premise that children must learn about emotions is that all feelings are okay to have; however, only some reactions are okay.”

[Daniel Goleman](#)

Students need to practice controlling their emotions. Having them brainstorm on ways they might react in different situations and then allowing them to role play, will provide an opportunity to practice their responses.

Teach students to feel empathy:

In a high-IQ job pool, soft skills like discipline, drive and empathy mark those who emerge as outstanding.

[Daniel Goleman](#)

Encourage students to view life from another person’s perspective. For example, a lot has been happening in the news with national disasters such as the fires and floods in California or the hurricanes that hit Texas and Florida. Ask them to write an essay on how they might feel to be a student from Puerto Rico that had to quickly pack up and move to a strange country, enroll in a new school, where they couldn’t speak the language and had to leave their friends and relatives behind. The purpose of these exercises is to have the children develop empathy for others going through some very difficult times.

For younger children, start by discussing the characters in a book and ask them to describe what the character may be thinking. “How did Cinderella feel after the stepsisters tore her dress apart?” “Why do you think the stepsisters did such a thing? What were they feeling?”

Teach students to handle [delayed gratification](#):

[The Marshmallow Test](#)

In the late 1960s there was a study lead by psychologist, [Walter Mischel](#) at Stanford University, which dealt with delaying gratification for the opportunity for a bigger, more valuable reward if they waited. The kindergarten children were taken into a room, one by one, and told that they were going to ask them a couple of questions, and when they were through, the child could have one of the marshmallows sitting on the table. The researcher was suddenly called out of the room (on purpose). She said she was sorry but had to leave the room for a while and she would be right back (approximately fifteen minutes). She then mentioned that when she got back, the child would get two marshmallows for waiting. They could either eat one now or have two when she returned. Little did the children know that they were being video-taped, recording their reactions.

Some children sat quietly and waited, others reached for the marshmallows and began eating immediately. The study followed the children throughout their lives and found a

direct correlation between those that could wait longer for the preferred reward, and how successful they became in their careers, family and adult life. The purpose of the study demonstrated that those who delayed their immediate gratification for a larger or more valuable reward in the end, learned how to persevere and were willing to wait and work towards achieving greater rewards. Those who ate the marshmallow immediately, did not obtain the same level of achievement in their future life as their counterparts. To view an updated version of the Marshmallow Test go to YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ.

Our American children are so used to immediately receiving their wants (bicycle at age 5, iPhone at age 10, car at 16), that most children don't know what delayed gratification is, yet alone see the value in it.

Teach students to volunteer and give back to society:

By teaching children to help others, makes them feel important and shows them they're doing something that really matters to the world. The act of charity teaches them to give back to their community and they will, in turn, develop the intrinsic values that come with it.

One year I asked for volunteers to help clean up our local beach area and was inspired to see the number of students who showed up on a rainy Saturday morning to help us out. After we were finished, I heard one student remark, "Wow, look what we accomplished!" They didn't receive a grade or extra credit for doing it, but I could see that the students valued their hard work and saw the importance of giving back to their community.

Allow students to make mistakes:

Students need to learn that every action comes with a consequence and it's okay to make mistakes. We learn from our errors. "...Errors need to be welcomed: The exposure to errors in a safe environment can lead to higher performance" (Hattie, 2011).

Teach students resiliency and to look at the big picture:

Students need to experience disagreement and conflict. Emotional learning is understanding that you don't always get what you want but that you must learn to handle it. They need to learn [conflict resolution](#) and learn how to give and take in various situations. Life doesn't always go their way and by understanding this and practicing solutions within a safe classroom, students will begin to view the bigger picture and see the value of accomplishing the group's goals.

Let your students feel frustration:

In our families, we tend to always put children first and many of them have never really felt frustration or didn't get what they wanted right away (refer back to delayed gratification). When they get stuck on a math problem, there is usually someone there showing them the way to solve it quickly. Life isn't always like that. There will be times when no one is there and they must find ways to look at the problem from different

angles and solve it on their own. In the classroom, now the time to struggle and experiment with ways to handle frustration.

I attended a workshop given by [Melina Uncapher, Ph.D.](#), who is an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Neurology, and is the Director of the Education Program at [Neuroscape](#). She stated that teachers, known as “Brain Architects,” need to “create desirable difficulties within the classroom.” They should be transparent about the benefit of making learning a bit tougher. Lessons that are “easily learned, are easily forgotten.” When a student struggles and solves a problem, it is encoded deeper into their brain, making it easier to retrieve. As stated earlier, mistakes and errors are necessary in the learning process and it’s important for students to understand why “failure is a good option” (Uncapher, 2017).

Teach them optimism and gratitude:

Dr. Shimi Kang, a Clinical Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia, and the founder of the Provincial Youth Concurrent Disorders Program at BC Children’s Hospital, says that “Gratitude is connected to emotional stability and internal control” (Kang, 2014). Having students look at the bright side of things and being grateful for all they do have, allows children to handle the tough times and helps them to look optimistically to the future.

For high school students:

The above mentioned points also apply to high school students, however, they obviously need to be taught at the age appropriate degree. At the secondary level, there’s an exciting program supported by the [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#), called [RULER](#), which allows students to learn about their emotions and how to regulate them. For further information check out their website at: <http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/>

- R**ecognizing emotions in self and others
- U**nderstanding the causes and consequences of emotions
- L**abeling emotions accurately
- E**xpressing emotions appropriately
- R**egulating emotions effectively

[James Heckman](#) the [Nobel Laureate](#), writes that teaching [non-cognitive skills](#) like perseverance, motivation, empathy, and self-control, “is a cost effective approach to increasing the quality and productivity of the workforce” (Brackett M. & Rivers, S., 2014, p.368.). More and more companies are realizing how important it is to have a high EQ.

Conclusion:

“If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far.” [Daniel Goleman](#)

Managing one’s emotions is critical in the game of life. Learning to manage those emotions starts at a very early age and should continue throughout one’s career. Your

students are a combination of their IQ and their EQ. Both equally important in developing a strong, healthy individual. As teachers it is our responsibility to teach and develop the [Whole Child](#), so take the time to help nurture their emotional intelligence, for that will not only be an asset to the student and the classroom culture, but to our society as well. (See ASCD's Whole Child Initiative @ <http://www.ascd.org/whole-child.aspx>.)

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