

Emotional intelligence: directing a child's emotional education.

by Melanie Richburg , Teresa Fletcher

The intrigue of why some people become successful while others fail despite natural talents, gifts, or intelligence has provoked inquiry into qualities that determine success. While some people possess varying degrees of ability, oftentimes the most talented are not always the most successful, happy, or wealthy, which goes against our rational way of thinking. Although it is premature to conclude that emotional intelligence plays a key role in determining life success, it is proposed that there may be a significant relationship. A description of these domains will be presented with examples in order to gain knowledge of the theoretical construct. The theory will then be applied to the conceptualization process with children with the intent of giving professionals insight into how to operationalize emotional intelligence.

The concept of emotional intelligence might be new to some professionals, however the idea has been in existence for some time. The popularization of this notion began with Howard Gardner's (1983) development of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, which included both interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. The concept of emotional intelligence was introduced by Salovey and Mayer in the early 1990s (see Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Salovey & Mayer, 1989-1990) and made popular by Daniel Goleman with the publication of his book (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence can be defined as "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1989-1990, p. 189).

Emotional intelligence has become popular in all settings from classrooms to boardrooms. The intrigue of why some people become successful while others fail despite natural talents, gifts, or intelligence has provoked inquiry into qualities that determine success. While some people possess varying degrees of ability, oftentimes the most talented are not always the most successful, happy, or wealthy, which goes against our rational way of thinking. Although it is premature to conclude that emotional intelligence plays a key role in determining life success, it is proposed that there may be a significant relationship.

Emotional intelligence can be broken down into five domains: (a) knowing one's emotions, (b) managing emotions, (c) motivating oneself, (d) recognizing emotions in others, and (e) handling relationships. A description of these domains will be presented with examples in order to gain knowledge of the theoretical construct. The theory will then be applied to the conceptualization process with examples of children and the intent of giving professionals insight into how to operationalize emotional intelligence.

Knowing One's Emotions

Emotional Intelligence

Goleman (1995) refers to this domain as the Self-awareness stage where one is able to recognize a feeling as it happens. This particular concept is viewed as the keystone of emotional intelligence. The ability to identify and monitor one's true feelings increases an individual's level of self-awareness and the ability to monitor and control our lives. This concept allows the individual to make conscious choices regarding major and minor life decisions.

According to Shapiro (1998), a child's ability to put his or her emotions into words is a vital part of meeting basic needs. Learning to identify and convey emotions is an important part of communication and a vital determinant in gaining emotional control. This concept is very useful in the development of fulfilling and nurturing relationships. The concept of knowing oneself begins with an awakening of the self. This results in the ability for an individual to look introspectively at one's thoughts, feelings and actions. It is akin to psychoanalysis where an individual uses self-reflection to gain a better sense of the self. By fine-tuning the level of knowledge of one's feelings where conscious and unconscious thought are subject to a level of exploration, one gains an emotional competence of the self.

An example of knowing one's emotions is as follows: Anna is given the opportunity to attend a concert for the very first time as a birthday gift from her parents. Two days before the scheduled performance Anna learns that the group has to cancel the concert due to illness of a group member. Anna verbalizes her disappointment and looks forward to the rescheduled event.

Managing Emotions

According to Goleman (1995), the ability to handle feelings in an appropriate manner is very significant in relation to the ability to increase one's level of self-awareness. This is interpreted as the ability to endure the ups and downs of life events with a degree of balance as it relates to the positive and negative experiences that predict and influence our emotional well-being and stability.

The cause and effect of emotions has a direct relationship to the signals transmitted to the brain. Howard (2000) supports the theory that events with the potential to elicit emotional responses must first pass the appraisal activity of the mind/brain. This activity is viewed as a rapid response, which takes place between stimulus and response. Therefore, the brain controls when and how emotions are stimulated. The effect of the stimuli transmits into a given emotion. Because of this relationship, an individual has the ability to determine the degree and duration of a given emotion.

An example of managing emotions is as follows: During a drive home from work Ted is delayed in traffic due to an overturned semi-tractor trailer blocking all lanes of the highway. Although Ted is disturbed with his current situation, he decides to release his frustration by engaging in deep breathing exercise and listening to soothing music.

Motivating Oneself

Motivation can be viewed as the extent to which an individual acts upon a given idea, thought, or goal. As theorists try to understand motivation and purpose in comparison to

the individual, attention is placed on the outcomes that behavior is directed at achieving rather than the behavior itself (Zirkel, 2000).

In contrast, the degree to which an individual plans and executes a thought or idea relies highly upon the means by which that individual is motivated to carry out the action based upon ability, aptitude, or training. The individual may choose to examine certain factors such as: desire, gratification, affect, outcome, benefits, and sacrifices (e.g., in order to attend a desired event, one must work late the night before to have time off the next business day). These factors may govern one's level and degree of self-motivation. Self-motivation governs one's ability to process outcome. Lane (2000) describes motivation as reflecting the ability to create positive affect to enhance motivation and achieve one's personal goals.

Goleman (1995) associates motivation with flow. Flow can be viewed as a state of self-forgetfulness and a representation where the ultimate harnessing of emotions creates an optimal experience in performance (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). During a state of flow, emotions are positive and there are feelings of harmony, joy and elation. This level of emotion leads to success because the individual is not consumed by the action, rather the pleasure of the act.

An example of self-motivation is as follows: An athlete decides to spend extra time in the weight room building upper and lower body strength as he prepares for the upcoming basketball season. One day later he is informed that he will be in the starting line up for the season opening game.

Recognizing Emotions In Others

As one continues to gain a high level of self-awareness, it is important to take into consideration the emotions and needs of other individuals. This sensitivity molds one's social skills, enhances one's empathic perspective and increases one's social competence. Gardner (1983) posits that the core capacity of personal intelligence as it relates to others involves "the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals" as it relates to mood, temperaments, and motivations (p. 239). He relates interpersonal intelligence in its primary form as a capacity of the young child to discriminate and detect moods of other individuals.

An example of recognizing emotions in others is as follows: While playing a game of soccer on the playground, Margaret fell down and scraped her knee. As the game continued, no one stopped to help Margaret except Justin, who observed her from the other side of the playing field. While helping Margaret to her feet and escorting her to the nurse to have her knee examined, Justin complemented Margaret on her attempt to score a goal.

Handling Relationships

The degree to which an individual forms and maintains relationships reflects one's level of self-awareness and social competence. Therefore, relationship building is viewed as a process. As we form relationships we have to identify certain needs inherent in this process such as: building, fostering, and maintaining associations with varying degrees of intimacy. This process can be quite difficult given the complexity of emotions and how they effect interactions with others.

Exposure to social situations increases the probability of having successful relationships. By engaging in activities that expand our worldview and increase our socialization skills, we gain a sense of balance in our exchange of emotional expressions and social competence. Also, one is able to view relationships as a state of reciprocity where the give and take of emotions and interactions is a mutual and respected exchange. Hendrick and Hendrick (1992) suggest that we experience many emotions toward other people. Those experiences can be summarized by the degree to which we like or dislike people. Liking and disliking can be described by the concept of interpersonal attraction or, simply attraction. In an effort to understand relationships, it is important to consider such issues as interaction and affiliation as integral components of the individual's experiences and associations.

An example of handling relationships is as follows: After serving five years as the assistant director of her department Judy was appointed vice-president of her organization. She is viewed by some of her colleagues as an intelligent, innovative, and creative individual. Judy realizes that there are those in the organization who do not endorse this appointment and have chosen not to support the change in structure at the organization. Thus, Judy has decided to incorporate a monthly brown bag lunch series to serve as a team-building period to gain the trust, cooperation, and respect of her colleagues and allow them the opportunity to share their vision and ideas for the future of the organization.

Conceptualization

Theoretical case conceptualization is a difficult process, however it serves as an integral part of effectively meeting a child's educational needs. Conceptualization can be described as "painting a metaphorical picture" of a person by understanding the educational, psychological, and emotional contributions to his or her behavior (Amundson, 1988). Professionals must have a clear assessment of the types of thoughts, feelings, and emotions that contribute to aversive or undesirable behavior in order to create effective intervention strategies. The process of conceptualization requires complex types of learning, which include application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Murdock, 1991).

One example contributes to the application of theory for case conceptualization where a 7-year-old boy was brought to counseling for enuresis, or bedwetting. The counselor used a systemic family theory to draw the conclusion that the enuresis was a symptom of a larger problem of not feeling safe due to a neglectful mother. The boy was conceptualized to have fears, which contributed to nightmares in turn causing the bedwetting. By having a solid concept of the problem, the counselor treated the neglect of the mother instead of the bedwetting and was successful (Fletcher, 1999). Similarly, emotional intelligence can be used to assist professionals in conceptualizing the needs of children.

The process of conceptualizing includes gathering information, integrating the information with theory, and formulating a plan to meet the needs of the students. Prior to integration, professionals must be armed with a theoretical framework According to

Murdock (1991), two types of information must be gathered. The first is demographic which might include age, sex, ethnic origin, current living situation, and physical health. The second type of information is theory specific and is determined by the professional's understanding of the theory. Emotional intelligence can be used to conceptualize children and all aspects of how emotions affect behavior and overall success. The journey of developing emotional intelligence begins with assessing an individual child's capacity for self-awareness. However, consideration must be given to the developmental level of the child.

Knowing one's emotions. There are two approaches to examine self-awareness in children. The first is to observe a child in their natural environment and focus on their reactions to various situations. When it is clear that the child is experiencing an emotion such as anger, guilt, shame, or frustration, encourage the child to identify the feeling or emotion. The response will be an indication of how aware this child is in the moment, which will be a good indication of self-awareness. The second approach can include manipulating the environment to create situations where self-awareness can be observed. For example, a group of first graders would probably respond favorably to toys. The toys can be specifically selected so that not all the children would want to play (such as all dolls or all trucks). Observe the reactions and behaviors of the children to the toys and ask them to identify the emotions. This type of activity can give a professional a good indication of which children have a greater capacity for self-awareness and which need to be taught how to identify their emotions.

Managing emotions. According to Aristotle, "Anyone can become angry--that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way--this is not easy." Managing or controlling one's emotions is the next step towards emotional intelligence once a person can identify the emotions. The goal of this concept is not to suppress emotions but to control them to a point that emotions do not become too extreme causing pathology such as depression, anxiety, anger, rage or frustration (Goleman, 1995). We cannot control the type of emotion, but we can assess the extent to which emotions determine behavior in case conceptualization. For example, most children are presented with frustrating situations. However, some are able to move on with little or no emotion where others go to the other extreme of using aggression or violence to express themselves. Again, situations of emotional management can be observed or manipulated in determining a child's competency in this area.

Motivating oneself. The third domain of emotional intelligence is self-motivation. The children that are self-motivated are able to attend school, complete assignments, and participate in class discussions with little or no prompting from teachers or parents. Oftentimes, these children are able to relate the importance of education in the moment with the understanding that knowledge will promote success in the future. These children complete projects that they start, find new and creative ways to peak interests, and can relate the process with outcome and delay gratification to reach the desired goal. According to Shapiro (1998), self-motivated children expect to succeed and set high goals for themselves. Unmotivated children may set low expectations and set efforts towards mediocrity.

Professionals can assess delayed gratification by performing a variation of the famous "marshmallow test" as described by Goleman (1995, pp. 80-83). A child can be given a cookie with the understanding that they can have it immediately if they choose, however if they wait (10 to 15 minutes) they can have two or more cookies. Conclusions from the original study indicated that children who were able to delay gratification were more socially competent, assertive, trustworthy, and dependable, and were better able to cope with frustrations and stress, embrace challenges, and show initiative (Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990).

Recognizing emotions in others. Many theorists have identified showing care and concern or empathy for others as an integral part of becoming emotionally and socially competent (Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995). Children can demonstrate empathic skills by offering to share food or supplies in school, assisting a disabled classmate, or consoling a friend after an accident on the playground. This also can be seen in infants that begin to cry when hearing other babies cry.

One way to assist empathy is to use real life situations to induce conversations and then observe how children respond. For example, when the World Trade Center was bombed on September 11, 2001, as a result of a terrorist attack, a professor lead a group of college students in a discussion to process the horrific events. Most students expressed concern, sympathy, and sorrow for the victims and families. Some students donated items, money, gave blood or expressed an interest in helping in the recovery effort. However, one student commented that she had been laid off her job while the country was in mourning and was interested only in getting back to work so she could resume her income. This incident provided the professor with a clear example of conceptualizing empathic skills of students in the class.

Handling relationships. According to Goleman, "Emotions are contagious." (1995, p. 114) This is very apparent when observing a group of athletes complaining or gossiping about another player or a coach. Only a few might have strong negative feelings, however the hostility can be felt by the entire group, an example of the contagion of emotions. Social competence and handling relationships is the last component and is influenced by all other parts of emotional intelligence.

Skills to observe in social competence include the ability to provide leadership and organization, negotiate and problem-solve, and maintain relationships with all types of people. Leadership skills can include organizing games on the playground or activities in the classroom. Children who are socially competent can initiate and carry on conversations, speak directly to others, and bring others into conversations. These types of students also may attempt to be people pleasers where they can be observed trying to behave specifically to win social approval.

The intentional use of theory for building conceptualization skills has received little systematic attention (Brammer, 1997; Murdock, 1991). **Although emotional intelligence is a fairly new phenomenon in the education field, we believe there is great potential**

for its use in promoting success in children. As stated previously, understanding and operationalizing the theory is essential in directing a child's emotional education. Emotional intelligence has been briefly described and applied to the process of conceptualization. Once professionals can identify which students have strengths in the five areas, they can positively reinforce those behaviors. Conversely, professionals can target areas for growth, plan activities around overcoming deficits and positively reinforce those behaviors that align with emotional intelligence.

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The Key to Our Emotions

(article from questia.com)

by Robert Epstein

"Emotional intelligence" has been touted as the key to success in all spheres of life: school, work, relationships. But according to Jack Mayer, Ph.D., who originated the concept of EI with Yale psychologist Peter Salovey, Ph.D., we still have a lot to learn about this skill. Mayer, a psychology professor at the University of New Hampshire, recently spoke with PT contributing editor Robert Epstein to clarify the uses and meanings of EI.

PT: What exactly is "emotional intelligence"?

JM: It's a group of mental abilities which help you recognize and understand your own feelings and others'. Ultimately, EI leads to the ability to regulate your feelings.

PT: So this is an intellectual skill. It's not just having feelings, but being able to understand what they mean.

JM: There are two sides to it. One side involves the intellect understanding emotion. The other side involves emotion reaching into the intellectual system and bringing about creative thoughts and ideas. That second side is hardest to pin down in the lab. But we believe it exists.

PT: Can emotional intelligence be learned?

JM: It doesn't make sense to me to talk about teaching an intelligence, although I know many people use that phrase. If emotional intelligence is like most other abilities, it is shaped partly by genetics and partly by environment. I like to talk about teaching knowledge. And I think it makes sense to talk about teaching emotional knowledge. I use this analogy: We don't say, "Can you learn math intelligence?" We say, "Can you learn algebra?" because we don't make our kids derive algebra from basic principles. We teach them about math as we understand it. It's the same thing with emotional intelligence. You don't have to rediscover all the rules of emotion on your own--no one has enough intelligence to do that. Rather, you can be taught what different feelings might mean and how they relate to yourself and others.

PT: What's wrong with the popular conception of emotional intelligence?

JM: The popular presentation of EI is so different from the research we've been doing. Emotional intelligence is often defined as a list of traits such as optimism, persistence and warmth. Then, claims are made about how important those are. I've become concerned about people who are going through any sort of EI program that is urging them to be as cheerful, happy and energetic as possible at work. No doubt there are a few people who are going to be helped that way, probably those people who are already upbeat and optimistic. But I think it is coercive to dictate how people are supposed to feel at work or other places, especially since these qualities are unrelated to many occupations. It's coercion without a genuinely useful agenda.

It is true that some salespeople can be helped by being optimistic and extroverted and so forth. But that's not necessarily a requirement for lawyers or teachers. And even in the

case of salespeople, although optimism does predict success, it is not all that is important or necessary.

PT: So does having EI guarantee that you're always in control of your emotions?

JM: I'd like to think that EI is independent of emotional state. I think you can be depressed and have high emotional intelligence, because everyone has a very good reason to be sad or depressed at some point or another. Given two people with negative emotions, I think the person with EI will climb out of his or her funk over the long term, though it won't necessarily be quick or easy. I would expect people to be sad and distressed at times--it is part of the human condition--and so emotionally intelligent people will be that way, too.

Robert Epstein is University Professor at United States International University and host of radio's nationally syndicated PSYCHOLOGY TODAY.