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Why should teachers be interested in something called emotional intelligence?
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What is emotional intelligence?
Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and understand the meanings of emotions and their complex relationships, and to reason and problem solve on the basis of these emotions. This ability allows you to

- *identify* and express emotions accurately;
- *understand* the cause of emotions and how they can change;
- *use* emotions to redirect attention and to encourage different approaches to decision making;
- *manage* positive and negative emotions and emotion-laden situations

A person with high emotional intelligence is able to understand complex emotions and emotional chains, and to know how emotions move from one stage to another. This person has the ability to recognize the cause of emotions, and to understand relations among emotions. This person can identify feelings, express emotions accurately and differentiate between real and false emotional expressions.

How do we use emotional intelligence in our work?
Emotional intelligence allows us to stay aware of our emotions, even those that are unpleasant, and to solve emotion-laden problems without necessarily suppressing negative emotions. Emotional intelligence allows us to build positive relationships with colleagues and others by being able to ‘read’ people, by being aware of our own and others emotions and so being able to use emotions wisely.

Is everyone emotionally intelligent?
We all have emotional intelligence but some individuals have developed a higher ability than others. In any population the levels of emotional intelligence is evenly distributed. From our research about teachers and emotional intelligence we have gathered data from over a thousand primary and secondary teachers (Perry, Ball, & Stacey, 2004; Perry, & Ball, 2005; Perry & Ball, in press). As can seen in the chart below, some teachers have very low levels and some with very high levels and the majority of us with normal levels of emotional intelligence.
What about teachers?

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What are the implications for teachers with high or low emotional intelligence ability?

Our research is showing that teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence are more sensitive than their lower scoring colleagues to their own emotions and the emotions of others. These teachers give consideration to the needs of students as well
as their own needs. This sensitivity to the emotional needs of others can be viewed from two aspects. Firstly, it recognises the uniqueness of the interaction between teacher and student and the skill of the more emotionally intelligent teacher in using this interaction to create more authentic learning opportunities that extend beyond the mere transition of knowledge. Secondly, this sensitivity indicates greater insight and self knowledge on the part of the teacher about how, in emotionally charged situations, they can manage their own emotional responses more effectively.

Teachers with low levels of emotional intelligence are less able to take the opportunity to ‘capture the moment’, to deal with feedback in a constructive way. In situations involving teaching peers, teachers with low levels of emotional intelligence may experience negative emotions but do not transform this emotion into a constructive solution. They remain trapped by the emotional state. They have very little opportunity to develop emotional resilience. These teachers are less able to ‘bounce back’ from negative emotional experiences than their colleagues who have high levels of emotional intelligence.

Research also indicates that teachers with varying levels of emotional intelligence react differently to emotions that are positively charged than to emotions that are negatively charged.

What’s the difference between positive and negative emotions?

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**Underlying dimensions of emotional intelligence for teachers**
As illustrated in the chart above, teachers do react to positively charged emotional situations differently than they do to negatively charged emotional situations. Levels of emotional intelligence play a part in these reactions, that is teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence respond differently than do teachers with low levels of emotional intelligence. Teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence deal more constructively with negative situations turning their responses into positive solutions. These teachers always respond appropriately in both positive and negative situations. Teachers with low emotional intelligence are sometimes likely to respond appropriately in positive situations but are seldom likely to do so in negative situation.

**What are some emotional situations for teachers?**

This situation might occur -

*Your students are actively involved in their group work, but you sense that a few are taking advantage of you, and becoming noisy and unproductive.*

Your response to this negatively charged situation might be -

I would feel trapped in such a situation. (This is an example of identifying the emotion)
I would realise that my feelings will affect what I do next. (Here you would be understanding the emotion)
I would feel comfortable about being able to handle this. (Here you would be using the emotion)
I would introduce another way of doing this in the future. (This is an example of managing the emotion and looking forward)

Or perhaps you are faced with this positively charged situation

*A student, who has recently made a special effort with a piece of work, says: “You are the best teacher I’ve ever had”.*

Your response might be to -

- *identify* the emotion, for example ‘I would feel acknowledged’.
- *understand* the emotion, for example ‘I would know that my reaction to this comment is linked with my knowledge of learners’.
- *use* the emotion, for example ‘I would say that they did well because of their effort not mine’.
- *manage* the emotion, for example ‘I would enjoy a feeling of pride and know that it would help me through difficult classroom situations in the future’.
In order to gauge the sustainability of your development of emotional intelligence, you would need to consider whether these types of responses in these types of situations would be never likely, seldom likely, sometimes likely, usually likely or always likely.

**How is emotional intelligence linked to effective teaching?**
Within the essential learning identified in the current school curriculum are the domains of personal and social learning. These involve skills associated with emotional intelligence. Teachers need to have these skills in order to pass them on to students. Teachers are encouraged to provide for their students, a supportive and productive learning environment. To do this relies very much on the teacher’s emotional intelligence. A recent study of teachers in Victoria (Penrose, Perry, & Ball, 2007) confirmed that a teacher’s level of emotional intelligence is related to their sense of efficacy, independent of their gender, age, status, and experience. Self efficacy is a person’s sense of being able to deal effectively with a particular task or situation. So a teacher with high emotional intelligence is able to work harder and persist longer because they have a belief in their ability and feel that they are in control. Efficacy is a strong predictor of coping behaviour and teacher self efficacy is strongly related to positive student achievement.

**Can you improve your emotionally intelligence?**
As with any ability, you can continue to develop your emotional intelligence. You can focus on enhancing skills such as -

**Self awareness**
- Try labelling your feelings, for example ‘I feel confident’, ‘I feel discouraged’ - try making a list of ‘emotional’ words.
- Focus on recognising the difference between thoughts and emotions, for example, a thought would be ‘I feel like a fool’ but an emotion would be ‘I feel rejected’. A thought would be ‘I feel as if they like me’, an emotion would be ‘I feel appreciated’.

**Emotional management**
- Taking responsibility for your feelings, for example ‘My anger made that situation worse’.
- Develop ways to gain time in emotional situations so that a positive end can be achieved.

**Empathy**
- Listen to others without taking on personal emotions
- Distinguish between what others do or say and your own personal reactions and judgements.

**Communication**
We are often not skilled in expressing our feelings; we often express our emotions indirectly. We often mis-communicate our emotions.
- Try making a list, alphabetically, of positive emotional words and negative emotional words.
- Increase your skills in reading non-verbal communication.

**Co-operation**
- Increase the number of situations where you lead and also the number of where you follow.
• Involve yourself in situations that require your co-operation and encourage the contributions of others

**Are there differences in teacher’s levels of emotional intelligence?**
Research has shown that Leading Teachers and Principals have higher levels of emotional intelligence than other groups of teachers, that is graduate, accomplished, and expert teachers.

Research is still unclear in regard to gender differences in emotional intelligence. Some major studies show females have higher levels of emotional intelligence than do males. However more useful are studies that look at differences of skill level within the measure. For example it is suggested that females score higher than males on measures of empathy and social responsibility, but males outperform females on stress tolerance and self-confidence measures. In other words, females and males are equally as intelligent emotionally, but they are strong in different areas.

Differences in levels of emotional intelligence are shown between those teachers in primary schools and those in secondary schools. In regard to the underlying dimensions of emotional intelligence, primary teachers are more willing to receive or acknowledge positive feedback. Primary teachers, more than secondary teachers, tend to take a reflective approach to teaching and in negatively charged situations, show an ability to adopt a strategy that allows them to move forward.

There also appears to be some differences in the underlying dimensions of emotional intelligence dependent on the type of school. Secondary teachers in rural schools show a greater capacity, than their primary colleagues, to manage themselves in teaching situations. Primary teachers in urban schools, compared with those in secondary schools, are more able to manage themselves in a teaching situation.

These factors have an influence on teachers’ ability to work effectively with colleagues, in teams and in general in school environments.

**How do I find out more about emotional intelligence?**
John Mayer, Peter Salovey and Davis Caruso write extensively about emotional intelligence in books and journal articles. Many of these can be found on the website maintained by Caruso (http://www.emotionaliq.com). The web also offers a variety of other sites dealing with emotional intelligence and emotional intelligence measures. Information about the Reactions to Teaching Situations measure can be found in the article we have written.

**Reference List**