

Emotional Intelligence: Educating the Right Mind for the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

This article focused on the importance of emotional intelligence in the education of students for the 21st century. The model of emotional intelligence developed by Nelson and Low (1977-2005) was presented and research findings indicating the importance of emotional intelligence skills in academic achievement were discussed. The recommendation that education be expanded to include the development of the emotional mind was supported by research in emotional intelligence and recent findings from affective neuroscience. If students are to develop essential life skills and the ability to think constructively and act wisely, the emotional mind must be understood and considered central to education for the 21st century.

Introduction

Extensive research (Ornstein, 1997; Epstein, 1998; and Nelson and Low, 2003) has indicated that the focus of current education is on rational and cognitive processes and that little emphasis has been placed on the important contributions of the emotional mind. Many current problems facing educators such as underachievement, lack of motivation, violence, alcohol and drug addiction are indications of the need to include an emphasis on the education of the 'right mind', the emotional or experiential mind.

Two minds are better than one, and positive behaviors that we value such as positive self esteem, meaningful goal achievement, dependability, effective communication, constructive thinking, emotional self control, problem solving skills, and healthy stress management skills involve higher psychological processes and the integration of cognitive and emotional minds. If you accept the premise that effective education involves the development of personal responsibility skills, we need to broaden our education experience to include specific learning experiences to help students develop the emotional intelligence skills essential to academic achievement, personal well-being, and career/life effectiveness. This expanded view of the role of education necessitates a focus on developing the 'right mind' as well as the cognitive mind.

Educating our two minds with a focus on how the cognitive and emotional mind work is the key to developing emotional intelligence. Emotionally intelligent behavior is reflected in the ability to think constructively and behave wisely. Intentional and self-directed behavior requires reflective thoughts. Wise and effective behavior requires the ability to regulate and express emotions in healthy ways. Emotional intelligence skills harmonize the cognitive and emotional minds and are essential to effective behavior.

New information from the area of affective neuroscience supports the research on the relationship of emotional intelligence to academic achievement and personal well-being. The development of the brain during the period from early adolescence to young adulthood is dynamic and significant. The learning experiences provided during this critical developmental

period can positively impact the development of skills essential to academic, career, and life effectiveness.

Defining and Quantifying Emotional Intelligence

In our model (Nelson and Low, 2003), emotional intelligence is defined as a confluence of developed skills and abilities to: (1) accurately know yourself in terms of personal strengths and weaknesses, (2) establish and maintain effective and healthy relationships, (3) get along and work productively with others, and (4) deal effectively and healthily with the demands and pressures of daily living. The Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP) is our research based assessment model and is used to help students identify and understand important emotional intelligence skills. The ESAP and our educational model for developing emotional intelligence are presented in our book, *Emotional Intelligence: Achieving Academic and Career Excellence*, Prentice Hall, 2003)

Effective and personally meaningful learning is a self-directed process. The ESAP allows students to identify their current level of emotional skills and collaboratively plan improvement with the help of a teacher, advisor, mentor, or counselor. The quality of the relationship with the individual student is an important variable. Emotional learning is transformative in nature and requires a student centered approach. The ESAP is a tool to begin a helping relationship with a student and provides a map or guide in developing strength focused emotional learning experiences.

The ESAP is a brief, valid, and reliable instrument suitable use in educational settings. The ESAP provides scale specific measurement of ten emotional intelligence skills and three problem areas. ESAP skill scales are positively correlated and interrelated, and each scale has enough independence to warrant individual interpretation. Cross cultural research with the ESAP indicates stable construct validity across cultures, and the instrument has been translated in several languages and is used world wide.

Factor analytic studies in the United States and China indicate that there are four distinct factors provided by the ESAP. These four factors of emotional intelligence have been identified as; (1) Interpersonal Skills, (2) Leadership Skills, (3) Self-Management Skills, and (4) Intrapersonal Skills. The specific emotional intelligence skills that contribute to these factors are: (1) Assertion, (2) Social Awareness, (3) Empathy, (4) Decision Making, (5) Positive Influence (Leadership), (6) Drive Strength (Goal Setting), (7) Commitment Ethic (Personal Responsibility), (8) Time Management, (9) Self Esteem, and (10) Stress Management. Research establishing the relationship of emotional intelligence skills to academic achievement (Nelson and Low, 2003; Vela, 2002; Nelson and Nelson. 2003; and Stottlemyer, 2002) has identified the ESAP scales of Assertion, Drive Strength, Commitment Ethic, Time Management and Stress Management as being significant predictors of academic success. A large scale study with high school and college students in China supported these findings. Emotional intelligence skills as measured by the ESAP are important factors in student achievement and personal well being.

Constructive Thinking and Emotional Intelligence

Einstein said long ago that humankind was doomed to self-destruction unless we change how we think. Our research and the research of Seymour Epstein (1999) have indicated that constructive thinking is a key factor in emotional intelligence. Constructive thinking is reflective and involves the ability to use both the cognitive and emotional mind in choosing and expressing

effective behavior. In order to develop constructive thinking skills, students must understand how our two minds work. Understanding the different functions and processes of the cognitive and emotional minds is essential to meaningful emotional learning.

A recent study (Nelson and Cox, 2004) has indicated that the emotional intelligence skills measured by the ESAP are significantly related to Epstein's positive thinking patterns as well as his key concept of global constructive thinking. Global constructive thinking as measured by Epstein's Constructive Thinking Inventory and the ten emotional intelligence skills measured by the ESAP are related and important factors in emotional intelligence. The empirical validity of the Constructive Thinking Inventory is extensive and supportive of the research findings reported by professionals using the ESAP in educational settings.

Constructive thinking is a key factor in academic achievement, career success, and personal well-being. The emotional intelligence skills identified by the ESAP assessment and global constructive thinking as measured by the Constructive Thinking Inventory provide a research based focal point for developing and implementing learning experiences to improve emotional intelligence. To improve emotional intelligence, education must focus on the individual student and the education of both minds.

From a practical view, emotional intelligence is the ability to think constructively and behave wisely. Emotionally intelligent behavior is characterized by what we have long called wisdom. A wise person is much more than an intelligent person. An intelligent person may possess an extensive vocabulary, exquisite logical reasoning skills, and exceptional abilities and knowledge in areas of science and mathematics and not be wise or effective in behavior. Emotional intelligence links and harmonizes thoughts and feelings into intentional and effective behavior. Wisdom is the ability to make good judgments based on experience. Understanding emotional experience and developing the ability to improve the emotional mind as well as the cognitive mind is essential to developing emotional intelligence.

Changing the emotional mind can occur at the speed of thought. Changing the emotional mind and improving our ability to think constructively requires a clear understanding of how our two minds work. Emotional learning occurs best in an educational environment that is student centered and focused on framing learning to a context that is personally relevant to the individual learner. Epstein has provided an excellent model to illustrate a point by point comparison of the functions and processes associated with both the cognitive and emotional (experiential) mind. Effective emotional learning must recognize and integrate these differential mind functions.

How Our Two Minds Work

The essential point for consideration in designing educational experiences that develop constructive thinking and effective behavior involves a clear understanding of how the cognitive mind and emotional mind differ in function and process. Most of the emphasis in current education is on teaching cognitive processes, and the evaluation of educational effectiveness centers on tested performance. It is important to emphasize that the cognitive and emotional minds are both ways of knowing and making sense out of our human experience. They are both cognitive systems.

Epstein (1998) points out that the emotional mind: (1) learns directly from experience, (2) thinks quickly for immediate action, (3) is holistic, (4) thinks in terms of associations, (5) is closely connected to emotions, (6) interprets experience and guides conscious thoughts and

behaviors through ‘vibes’ from past experiences, (7) sees the world in concrete images, metaphors, and stories, (8) is experienced passively as if we are sized by our emotions, (9) experiences its beliefs as self-evidently valid (experiencing is believing), (10) pays attention only to outcome, (11) thinks in terms of broad categories, (12) operates in different modes corresponding to specific emotional states, and (13) changes slowly with repetitive or intense experience.

In contrast, Epstein (1998) has shown that the cognitive mind: (1) learns from abstract representations, (2) thinks slowly, deliberately and is oriented toward planning and consideration, (3) is analytic, (4) thinks in terms of causes and effects, (5) separates logic from emotions, (6) interprets experience through conscious appraisal of events, (7) sees the world in abstract symbols (words and numbers), (8) experienced actively and consciously (as if we are in control of our thoughts), (9) requires justification by logic and evidence (give me proof), (10) pays attention also to process, (11) thinks in terms of finer distinctions and gradations, (12) highly integrated and more internally consistent, and (13) changes rapidly. This point by point comparison of the workings of our two minds has important implications for education.

Effective behavior and wisdom seem to require an understanding and integration of the emotional mind and the cognitive mind. An emphasis on one to the neglect of the other leads to behavior that is incomplete. By accepting the value of both minds, we can develop educational experiences that impact thinking, the constructive expression of emotions, and the development of wise and effective behaviors. Emotional intelligence skills are higher psychological processes that harmonize the two minds and contribute to academic success, career and work effectiveness, and personal well-being (mental and physical health)

Ornstein (1997) has stated that education must focus on both minds and called for an educational system that recognizes how our brains work. Epstein (1998) has argued for the recognition that the emotional mind plays an important role in the development of constructive thinking and that students need to learn how to develop positive thinking patterns. Our research (Nelson and Low) has identified some of the positive contributions of the emotional mind to academic achievement, effective teaching, and mental health.

Educating the Right Mind

The young people of the world are the most important resource in the global economy. We can no longer afford to ignore the vast numbers of students who do not benefit from our current educational system. Underachievement, lack of motivation, alcohol and drug addiction, violence, and severe mental health problems are a few of the indications that something is going wrong. We argue for the inclusion of emotional learning as a central focus in education for the 21st century.

The education of the right mind necessitates a view of learning that is transformative rather than cognitive and information based. In our view, education must be relevant to the individual student’s experience and provide learning that the student can use to improve themselves as well their world.

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