

Empowerment through Higher Education: Developing Emotional Competence

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Abstract

We all are emotional beings, our thinking shaped by the good and bad experiences we encounter in our lives. With time, some of us become extremely emotional, while some become tough nuts, and some fail to reciprocate the feelings of others. Emotionally weak individuals find it tough to manage their thoughts; they have difficulty in taking negative feedback, and also tend to get upset at the slightest provocation. However, there are some people smarter in handling relationships, or a complex situation than others. They are not deeply emotional, but are considerate while dealing with people. Such people know what to speak, when to speak, when to keep quiet and be patient. They have a gut feeling and at any given moment they do, for them and others, what they think is right. Such people have a good emotional quotient (EQ), (a measure of emotional intelligence, just as IQ measures intelligence) the importance of which is growing with each passing day, surpassing even the highly valued intelligence quotient (IQ).

With the ever-increasing pressures at work, within the community, and at home, the ability of individuals to deal with the daily environmental demands and pressures is getting even more critical. Cognitive intelligence (IQ) accounts for up to 25% of the variance in professional success and job performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984). Social and emotional abilities are four times more important than IQ in determining success (Sternberg, 1996). In 1990, Salovey and Mayer coined the term "emotional intelligence" (EI) and based their work on the non-cognitive aspects of intelligence. These authors defined emotional intelligence as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' thinking and action."

An Ability to be developed: Emotional Intelligence

"Emotional Intelligence (EI) describes the ability, capacity, skill or, in the case of the trait EI model, a self-perceived ability, to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups." The term, 'emotional intelligence', literally means having wise emotions, which have the understanding of time and space. This means that one will exhibit one's emotions when the moment is right, which is why this behavior has been deemed as emotional intelligence at work.

According to Bar-On (2002), emotional intelligence is "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures". Broadly defined, emotional intelligence "addresses the emotional, personal, social, and survival dimensions of intelligence". Emotional intelligence and emotional skills develop over time, change throughout life, and relate to one's potential for performance, are process-oriented, and can be improved through training. Dr. Reuven Bar-On developed the EQ-i: Bar-

On Emotional Quotient Inventory, which measures 5 components and 15 subcomponents. These include:

- Intrapersonal- assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, independence, and emotional self-awareness
- Interpersonal-interpersonal relationships, social responsibility, and empathy
- Adaptability-problem solving, reality testing, and flexibility
- Stress Management-impulse control and stress tolerance
- General Mood-happiness and optimism

Although many definitions exist, the basic ideas are the same. Emotionally intelligent people are aware of their emotions and the emotions of others. They use that information to guide their thinking and actions.

Emotional Intelligence: A Higher Education Perspective

Understanding the crucial role emotional competence plays in individual, group, and organizational success, its implication for education is clear i.e. we should be helping young people master these competencies as essential life skills. Efforts are being made to some extent to provide social and emotional learning (SEL) to students at school level but when it comes to preparing young people in the essential emotional intelligence skills that matter most for their success in the workplace, for piloting their careers, and for leadership, we face a serious gap. These programs cover the early school years but not higher education. Only a scattered handful of pioneering courses on social and emotional learning exist at the college or professional level. And yet the data showing the crucial role EI skills play in career success make a compelling case for re-envisioning higher education in order to give these capabilities their place in a well-rounded curriculum.

Emotional knowledge, skills, and intelligence hold a major key to improving education and helping students, teachers, faculty, and student development professionals attain higher degrees of achievement, career success, leadership, and personal well-being. There are many important issues and challenges facing education at the public school and higher education levels. While academic achievement and scholastic performance have been the primary thrust of recent reform efforts, other equally important issues have taken center stage in education. Physical safety, healthy emotional development, standards of excellence and equalitarianism, a global economy and world perspective, changing workforce demands and the nature of work, multi-cultural and diversity issues, retention through graduation, and personal/career needs of students and educators are just a few examples. These important issues require a different and more balanced perspective of accountability and quality standards to include emotional learning and the affective domain.

Academic and cognitive development is the primary and chief goal of schools, colleges and universities. However, it may prove disastrous if the emotional and affective domain is neglected as an important and necessary role for schools and communities. A blending of academic (cognitive), behavioral (action), and affective (emotional) dimensions are needed to address the complex issues facing education. To meet the issues and challenges of education, especially higher education, there is a need to develop responsible and emotionally healthy students and teachers. Emotional

skill development and personal responsibility need to be embraced and in effect just as it is with the academic and behavioral dimensions.

A widely reported national study by the American College Test organization on the topic of drop-outs in the freshman year of college revealed that academic ability (cognitive domain) was not the major factor. The primary reasons for dropping out were not academic but personal factors (emotional domain) such as loneliness, lack of purpose, and feelings of inadequacy. While academic development is the primary purpose of education, there is a wealth of information and experience that confirm the importance and impact of emotional intelligence skills and competencies. Extensive reviews of studies at schools and organizational levels indicate that emotional intelligence skills are essential to achievement, leadership, and personal health (Goleman, 1995, 1997).

In studying the world's best educational practices, Dryden and Vos reported that personal and emotional development is at the very center of these programs. Their findings indicate that the emotional intelligence skills of self-esteem and personal confidence are essential to all learning. They declare that education that fails to address these factors (i.e. personal/emotional domain) will fail in its other tasks as well (Dryden and Vos, 1994). Leading educators have identified and emphasized the importance of a healthy school, college and university climate for student learning and achievement (Goodlad, 1983; McQuary, 1983). Emotional intelligence skills and competencies are key to creating and maintaining a healthy and productive educational climate.

To achieve the educational aspirations of the 21st century, there is an increasing need to develop healthy, responsible, and productive students, teachers, faculty, staff, and administrators in all academic disciplines. Accountability needs to be embraced and in effect in academic, behavior, and emotional development. A number of leading researchers have concluded that emotional intelligence and related on-traditional measures of intelligence and human performance are as predictive (if not more so) of success as IQ tests and other standardized measures of scholastic ability and achievement (Salovey and Mayer, 1997; Goleman, 1995, 1997; Dryden and Vos, 1994).

Interdisciplinary research clearly connects emotional intelligence and emotional skills to achievement, career success, personal health and well-being, and leadership. This line of research carries a crystal clear message for colleges and universities who strive to develop their students to the fullest. Fundamental beliefs and core values of student development in higher education have included the following:

- recognition of the preeminence of the academic mission of the university
- respect for the integrity and well-being of each student
- commitment to actively building a healthy and safe learning environment
- equality and fairness in serving all students
- a celebration of diversity

These beliefs and values are consistent with the academic goals of higher education. They need to be embraced with institutional commitment and

accountability. Colleges and universities are expected to document how academic and student development programs lead to and result in student achievement, retention, career enhancement, and leadership development. A balanced system of accountability and commitment is needed. Student development programs, utilizing an education and research-based model of emotional intelligence competencies and skills, are needed to demonstrate this institutional commitment to accountability.

A college or university is viewed as a place where students grow through their involvement in meaningful relationships. Students' benefits from relationships that (1) make them feel valued, (2) contribute to positive self-worth, (3) create a healthy, productive learning community, and (4) form a personal sense of belonging. Healthy relationships are important to the academic, behavioral and emotional growth and development of students. Emotional knowledge, skills, and competencies are essential to the student development values of individuation and community. The affective or emotional learning domain is central to student development. Experiential and self-directed learning activities need to be systematic and accountable. Colleges and universities need to be able to demonstrate and show faculty, students, and the entire academic community how courses, programs, services, and resources make a difference in professional and personal development. Student development programs are positioned to meet this type of institutional accountability.

Emotional intelligence skills are vital to human performance and the management of successful learning organizations. Even though the primary attention of education is academic performance, there is simply too much convincing evidence that schools and colleges should not and cannot neglect the development of emotional intelligence skills and other personal and social factors. Emerging trends necessitate new studies and applied research on the contributions of the emotional mind and the emotional domain of learning. Building healthy and productive students requires the active and intentional development of emotional intelligence skills and competencies as a normal and integral part of the process of education. Many student development researchers and leaders have emphasized human development and affective learning as an essential component of the higher education experience.

For the past several decades higher education researchers have been advocating for institutional reform that places the learner at the center of a community of learners who are all engaged in a shared processes of human enlightenment. The implications very strongly suggest that learning is a process of interconnectivity that involves not just the rational intellect but the emotive and relational as well. These research findings bring forth serious challenges to the current paradigm that rests on the theory that learning is best facilitated by isolating students from other students and teachers from students in sterile and separate disciplines where cross-fertilization of thoughts and ideas are kept to a minimum. This evidence seems to suggest that many of the commonly accepted higher education practices and institutional structures may very well inhibit rather than facilitate the processes of learning.

The most important goal for every institution of higher education is academic development. However, in today's diversified society, students need much more to lead healthy and productive lives concerning academic, career and personal goals. Therefore, it is crucial for institutions of higher education to develop academic advising and student learning models that embodies both the academic (cognitive) and

emotional (affective) development of students. Students with a strong academic and emotional foundation will model and demonstrate behaviors that are conducive to goal attainment and overall success in life. Consequently, leaders in student development must engage in applied institutional research to begin to develop and improve models for student retention and performance. This research is vital for students and higher education personnel to study and to model continuous program improvement and effective leadership.

Empowerment in Higher Education through Emotional Intelligence

The role of teachers in the development of emotional intelligence skill in students especially at the tertiary education (i.e. faculties of education and colleges of education) cannot be over-emphasized. Teachers should first acquire a skill to exploit the advantages of each dimension of students' emotional intelligence. Teachers should have knowledge of emotional intelligence so that they can help to develop the emotional intelligence amongst their students. Students should be taught the strategy to handle the problem of emotion and the ways to cooperate with others. It is when the students are able to control their emotion that they will be able to concentrate on their studies and profit credibility from the opportunities the education offers.

Teachers equipped with adequate emotional intelligence skills would be able to generate a pleasurable classroom by having a dynamic group discussion with the students. Through this students would be able to identify the feelings of their mates and get the feedback based on their reaction i.e. they will develop the feeling of empathy. Such teachers would be able to apply several strategies to reduce the incidences of cultism, substance abuse, examination malpractices and poor academic performance prevalent in the higher tertiary education. By this strategy, teachers will be able to reduce the negative effect of students' anxiety in each learning process by constructing an acceptable and pleasurable condition that gives psychological support to the students and empowering them to lead a quality life.

Of significance to note is that the study towards the aspect of emotional intelligence is still very new; education researchers and others are hoped to be very inspired to give their intention towards the study of emotional intelligence as it is relevant to the citizens' social and educational environment. The experts in educational psychology are called upon to consider and redesign the educational psychology curriculum that involves the issue of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence may be considered as a unit course in the psychology of development or Developmental Psychology courses that are offered in faculties of education and colleges of education.

Indeed, there is a merit in challenging the perception of what institutions can do for employers by making the correlation between the environment and style of learning in higher education and the positive impacts on developing emotional intelligence just as it happens in corporate and industries. However, universities are facing strong competition from an employer's in-house solutions for the development of talent, as well as private sector providers. Higher education institutions have untapped potential to lead with their own strategy, one that orients around developing the emotional intelligence of the individual through their life. Arguably, institutions must also work with schools and further education, prior to higher education, in order

to begin the development of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, universities and colleges need context for their learning interventions and, therefore, should be forming partnerships with employers as early as possible in an individual's life.

When higher education institutions can articulate their learning environment in the context of developing emotional intelligence, they have the potential to provide a differentiated proposition to employers and establish a new dynamic of partnership. This is already (maybe) happening, but more can and should be done to benefit employers, employees and their leadership and management; so we continue to search for opportunities to collaborate and prepare the leaders of today and tomorrow for a changing world.

Higher Education literature indicates recent applications of emotional intelligence especially self-regard and how they can improve communication effectiveness. Self-regard plays an important role in emotional intelligence. Self-regard is individuals' perception of themselves. The self-concept can be an agent and motivates individuals to take on an action. Individuals with high self-regard tend to have higher emotional intelligence and this action lead to improvement in communication effectiveness. The goal of introducing instruction in emotional intelligence with communication effectiveness is to expose managers and administrators to a framework that describes specific competencies needed for educational administration. People with high self-regard are likely to have good communication and will probably be successful in anything they decide to do .On the other hand people with low self-regard are likely to have a hard time in communication with others.

One area where emotional intelligence comes into play in the higher education organization is in providing feedback to employees. Too often critiques come across as personal attacks and employees play out the same scenarios they use in their families at the workplace. The scenarios become dysfunctional when applied to the workplace. Sarcasms, angry voices, and blanket criticisms only serve to destroy motivation. Employees feel they are being treated as children and may act out in ways that are not productive. Instead, Goleman suggests, as do most management texts, that positive coaching includes concentrating on behaviors and not the person, offering solutions and being empathetic while discussing difficult issues with employees. For the employee receiving criticism, the challenge is to see the criticism as information that can be used to improve performance. Individuals with high emotional intelligence scores are better able to place the criticism in context and not see it as a personal attack, regardless of how the conversation is approached by the supervisor.

Conclusion and Implications

Notable countries belonging to the G8 (the richest countries club) such as the United States and the United Kingdom have begun to understand that being one of the eight most industrialized, richest and most influential countries on the planet does not guarantee that the citizens are satisfied with their lives or are happy. In the context of Malaysia, the aspect of emotional intelligence is primarily focused in the National Philosophy of Education. Spain finds itself at an excellent moment to make educational policies and investment similar to United States, United Kingdom

and Malaysia. Each of these countries is pursuing emotional intelligence in their own way.

In realizing the reality of emotional intelligence, the curriculum of education right from primary to tertiary education is being reviewed by considering the role of emotional intelligence. However, the efforts to implement the emotional intelligence in ensuring the accomplishment and the development of students' self should not be executed intellectually. The responsibility should not be beard only by the teachers, but the need of the hour is of a paradigm shift in the system of education together with professionalism of teacher education. The policy-maker of education should arrange the liberty and an approach as well as the firm support to ensure the balance of national education's system from the aspect of emotional intelligence and intellectual intelligence.

In the academic world, the issue of emotional intelligence is still relatively new; therefore, many studies should be done before researchers establish clear and unambiguous relationships between the degree of emotional intelligence and success, both on personal and organizational levels. Because of its impact on today's organizational success, it is critical to implement effective EQ training into university and college curricula and system in order to prepare not only students but also teachers, and those in authorities for thriving corporate careers and successful personal relationships and of course at the end to be able to give quality education for which they have been established.

Leaders and managers need to understand their own emotions and recognize and understand the feelings of those around them. Leaders are more successful when they pay attention to their social interactions with others in the workplace and the impact they as leaders have on those around them. It is also important for leaders to understand the impact that others' emotions have on them. When leaders are aware of the emotional side of the workplace along with the technical processes of getting tasks and goals accomplished, they are better able to create a working environment that encourages excellence. Managing our emotions means something quite different from stifling them. It means understanding them and then using that understanding to turn situations to our benefit.

Hopefully, the most forward-thinking educators will recognize the importance of emotional intelligence in higher education, not just for the empowerment of students, not just for empowering the teachers, but for the vitality and empowerment of the economy as a whole.

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