

# Schooling the Emotional Mind

Children have two minds — one that thinks and one that feels. An inch or so beneath the curls, buzz jobs and baseball caps, just behind the contact lenses and lashes, sit two systems operating two different yet interdependent intelligences: rational (IQ) and emotional (EQ). How children function each day and throughout life is determined by both. Rational intelligence cannot perform well without emotional intelligence, and emotional intelligence benefits from the cool cognitive judgments of the rational mind. When the two perform together smoothly and efficiently, emotional intelligence rises and so does intellectual ability.

Thanks to psychologist and author Daniel Goleman, the term *Emotional Intelligence* has become part of our daily lexicon. Goleman's best-seller *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, a superb presentation of research from education, medicine, and the behavioral and brain sciences, forms the basis for much of the ensuing discussion as well as the accompanying strategies and activities.

## What Is Emotional Intelligence?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines emotion as "an intense mental state that arises subjectively rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes" and as "the part of the consciousness that involves feeling; sensibility."

The word *emotion* is a derivative of the Latin root, *movere*, to move. Anyone who has experienced intense joy, desire, anger, or grief knows that emotions are anything but static mental states. Emotions are something we *do*.

Emotions shift our attention and propel us into action, rapidly organizing the responses of different biological systems — facial expression,

muscle tone, voice, nerves, hormones — and putting us in optimum condition to respond. Emotions serve to establish our position relative to our environment, pulling us toward certain people, objects, actions, and ideas, and pushing us away from others. They allow us to defend ourselves in dangerous situations, fall in love, protect the things we value, mourn significant loss, and overcome difficult obstacles in the pursuit of goals.

The words *emotion* and *motivation* are closely related. In order to be strongly motivated we have to *feel* strongly. We are moved to *do* things, and we are moved *by* things. In Goleman's words, "Every strong emotion has at its root an impulse to action; managing those impulses is basic to emotional intelligence."

The terms *emotional intelligence*, *emotional literacy*, *emotional competence*, and *emotional competencies* are used in varying contexts throughout these pages. *Emotional intelligence* is the capacity to acquire and apply information of an emotional nature, to feel and to respond emotionally. This capacity resides in the emotional brain/mind. *Emotional literacy* and *emotional competence* are used interchangeably to describe the relative ability to experience and productively manage emotions. The shorthand for these terms is EQ. *Emotional competencies* are skills and attributes — self-awareness, empathy, impulse control, listening, decision making, anger management — whose level of development determines the strength of our emotional intelligence and the degree of our emotional competence.

## The Impact of Emotional Intelligence

Emotions impact every area of life: health, learning, behavior, and relationships.

Children and young people who are emotionally competent— who manage their own feelings well, and who recognize and respond effectively to the feelings of others — are at an advantage in every area of life, whether family and peer relationships, school, sports, or community and organizational pursuits. Children with well-developed emotional skills are also more likely to lead happy and productive lives, and to master the habits of mind that will assure them personal and career success as adults.

In homes and schools where emotional intelligence is nurtured with the same concern as IQ, children tolerate frustration better, get into fewer fights, and engage in less self-destructive behavior. They are healthier, less lonely, less impulsive, and more focused. Human relationships improve, and so does academic achievement.

### Health

There is no longer any question that emotions can profoundly affect health. Science used to believe that the brain and nervous system were separate and distinct from the immune system. In fact, the two systems are in close communication, sending messages back and forth continuously. Furthermore, chemical messengers which operate in both the brain and the immune system are concentrated *most heavily* in neural areas that regulate emotion. Here are just a few of the implications:

- Inhibiting or constraining emotions compromises immune function. People who hide their feelings or refuse to talk about significant emotional upsets are at higher risk for a variety of health problems.

- Anger, and other negative emotions are toxic to the body and pose dangers comparable to smoking cigarettes.
- Studies have linked the colds and upper respiratory infections to emotional upsets that occurred three to four days prior to the onset of symptoms.
- Numerous studies have shown that positive, supportive relationships are good medicine, bolstering immune function, speeding recovery time, and prolonging life. The prognosis for people in ill health who have caring family and friends is dramatically better than for people without emotional support.

### Learning

Almost all students who do poorly in school lack one or more elements of emotional intelligence. Study after study has shown that competence in emotional skills results not only in higher academic achievement on the part of students, but in significantly more instructional time on the part of teachers. Emotionally competent children are far less disruptive and require fewer disciplinary interventions.

Furthermore, academic intelligence, as measured by IQ and SAT scores, is not a reliable predictor of who will succeed in life. IQ contributes about 20 percent to factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 percent to other forces. Numerous studies have shown that IQ has minimal impact on how individuals lead their lives — how happy they are, and how successful. One major reason is that while cognitive skills are tied to IQ, desire and motivation are products of emotional intelligence. Children who are emotionally competent have an increased desire to learn and to achieve, both within school and without. Positive emotions — excitement, curiosity, pride — are the fuel that drives motivation. Passion moves young people toward their goals.

## Behavior

Violence and disorder in America's schools have reached crisis proportions. Teachers who once dealt with mischievous, unruly students and an occasional temper tantrum are now demanding emergency phones in their classrooms, security guards in the hallways, and metal detectors at the gates. As long as such conditions continue, all education suffers. Rates of teen suicide, pregnancy, and drug abuse testify to the need for emotional literacy: self-awareness, decision-making, self-confidence, and stress management.

## Relationships

Children who are effective in social interactions are capable of understanding their peers. They know how to interact with other children and adults — flexibly, skillfully, and responsibly — without sacrificing their own needs and integrity. They have a good sense of timing and are effective at being heard and getting help when they need it. Socially competent children can process the nonverbal as well as verbal messages of others, and recognize that the behaviors of one person can affect another. They take responsibility for their actions.

Children who cannot interpret or express emotions feel frustrated. They don't understand what's going on around them. They are frequently viewed as strange, and cause others to feel uncomfortable. Without social competence, children can easily misinterpret a look or statement and respond inappropriately, yet lack the ability to express their uncertainty or clarify the intentions and desires of others. They may lack empathy and be relatively unaware of how their behavior affects others.

## Early Development

The first school for emotional literacy is the home. How parents treat their children has deep and lasting consequences for their emotional life.

In order to help children deal constructively with their emotions, parents must themselves have a reasonable degree of emotional literacy. The children of emotionally competent parents handle their own emotions better, are more adept at soothing themselves when they are upset, enjoy better physical health, are better liked by their peers, are more socially skilled, have fewer behavior problems, greater attention spans, and score higher on achievement tests.

Parents who ignore or show a lack of respect for their child's feelings, or who accept any emotional response as appropriate, are putting their child in peril not only for emotional development, but for intellectual development as well.

Bullies — children who tend toward violence — have parents who ignore them most of the time, show little interest in their lives, yet punish them severely for real or perceived transgressions. These parents are not necessarily mean-spirited, they are usually repeating parenting styles that were practiced on them in childhood. Intellectually, they may want the best for their children, but have no inkling how to achieve it.

The emotional skill that violent children lack above all others is empathy. They are unable to feel what their victim is feeling, to view the situation through the eyes of the other child. In many cases, this lack of empathy is due to parental abuse. Abuse kills empathy.

Children who are repeatedly abused often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When a child's life is in danger and there is nothing the child can do to escape the peril, the brain actually changes.

A structure within the brain of children with PTSD secretes extra-large doses of brain chemicals in response to situations that are reminders of traumatic events, even when present events hold little or no threat. Oversecretions also occur from the pituitary gland, which alerts the body to danger and stimulates the fight or flight response. Thus, PTSD is a *limbic disorder*.

The good news is that the behavior of emotionally troubled children — bullies and children with PTSD — can change. The emotional circuitry can be rewired through relearning.

### Emotional Windows

Research indicates that being bold or shy, upbeat or melancholy is at least partially genetic. Children may be predisposed to a certain temperament based on the relative excitability of the amygdala. However these innate emotional patterns can be improved with the right experiences.

Early emotional learning poses a similar problem. Synaptic connections are formed very quickly, in a matter of hours or days. In Goleman's words, "Experience, particularly in childhood, sculpts the brain."

The key skills of emotional intelligence each have a critical learning period extending over several years in childhood. Massive sculpting of neural circuits takes place during these periods,

each of which represents an optimal "emotional window" for learning specific skills. Once the emotional brain learns something, it never lets it go; once a window is closed, the pathway is forever etched. That's why changing in adulthood is so difficult. In fact, the patterns probably never change, though they can be controlled through new insights and with new learned responses.

The responses of the amygdala are well established long before a child leaves elementary school; however, the frontal lobes which regulate the limbic impulse mature into adolescence. Through skills and habits acquired at later ages, children can still learn to control their feelings, turn down the emotional thermostat, and substitute positive behaviors for negative.

### Gender Differences

Girls receive significantly more education regarding emotions from their parents than do boys. In discussion, play, and fantasy, mothers cover a wider range of emotions with their daughters than with their sons.

Combine this greater knowledge with the fact that girls develop language skills more quickly than do boys and it is clear why girls find it easier to articulate their feelings and to use verbal exploration of feelings as substitutes for physical confrontations and fights, a difference that behavioral scientists have measured at about age 13. The chart summarizes gender differences in emotional intelligence.

#### Girls at 13:

- are adept at reading verbal and nonverbal emotional signals and expressing feelings.
- experience a wide range of emotions with intensity and volatility.
- have learned to use tactics like ostracism, gossip, and indirect vendettas as substitutes for aggression.
- see themselves as part of a web of connectedness.

#### Boys at 13:

- are adept at expressing anger
- minimize emotions having to do with vulnerability, guilt, fear, and hurt.
- are confrontational when angry
- take pride in a lone, tough-minded independence and autonomy



## Controlling Emotions

If the sentry (the amygdala) and the neural pathways can't be changed, then the primary goal of emotional education is to improve the skills of the strategist — the neocortex. As we've seen, the neocortex is capable of managing the amygdala by reshaping its responses. Children will still have their emotional outbursts, but can learn to control how long they last and the behaviors they produce.

Psychotherapy is a classic example of this process, with the client engaging in systematic emotional relearning. Therapy teaches people to control their emotional responses. Consistent positive discipline — the kind that focuses on feelings underlying behavior and on identifying alternatives to unacceptable behavior — accomplishes the same thing.

The ability to bring out-of-control emotions back into line results in what our parents and grandparents called *emotional maturity*. Present terminology labels it *emotional competence*, the "master aptitude."

### Self-Awareness

The first step in getting children to control their emotional responses is to help them develop self-awareness. Through self-awareness, children learn to give ongoing attention to their internal states, to know what they are feeling when they are feeling it, to identify the events that precipitate upsets and emotional hijackings, and to bring their feelings back under control. Goleman defines self-awareness as:

*...awareness of a feeling or mood and our thoughts about the feeling. ...a slight stepping-back from experience, a parallel stream of consciousness that is "meta": hovering above or beside the main flow, aware of what is happening rather than being immersed and lost in it.*

Self-awareness allows children to manage their feelings and to recover from bad moods more quickly. Children who are self-aware don't hide things from themselves. Labeling feelings makes them their own. They can talk about fear, frustration, excitement, and envy and they can understand and speculate concerning such feelings in others, too.

Lacking self-awareness, children may become engulfed by their feelings, lost in them, overwhelmed by them. Unawareness of what is going on in their inner and outer worlds sets the stage for lack of congruence between what they believe or feel and how they behave. Feelings of isolation ("I'm the only one who feels this way.") occur when children are unaware that others experience the same range of feelings that they do. Without self-awareness children never gain control over their lives. By default, their courses are plotted by others or by parts of themselves which they fail to recognize.

Self-awareness can take the form of nonjudgmental observation ("I'm feeling irritated.") or it can be accompanied by evaluative thoughts ("I shouldn't feel this way" or "Don't think about that.") Although in and of themselves, emotions are neither right nor wrong, good nor bad, these kinds of judgments are common and indicate that the neocortical circuits are monitoring the emotion. However, to try to abolish a feeling or attempt to take away a feeling in someone else only drives the emotion out of awareness, where its activity along neural pathways continues unmonitored and unabated — as neuroses, insomnia, ulcers, and communication failures of all kinds testify.

## Managing Anger and Curbing Impulses

*Eric started his day, not to the sounds of the birds or the local morning DJ, but to the jarring pre-dawn combat of his warring parents. The breakfast cereal was gone, the milk was sour, and there were no clean diapers for the baby whose fussing and screaming at length interrupted the din from the master bedroom. Accused of hurting the baby, Eric was scolded by his mother and slapped by his father. He fled the house without books or homework, almost missed the bus, and when he got to school was berated by his teacher for coming unprepared. At recess, Eric walked into the path of a speeding soccer ball, which stung his back and knocked him breathless. When he regained his wind, Eric found the boy who had kicked the ball and beat him until his face was bloody.*

Eric had plenty of reasons to be angry. What he did not have, at least in this incident, were the internal skills or the external support system to help him process his feelings and prevent the anger from building.

Threats to life, security, and self-esteem trigger a two-part limbic surge: First, hormones called *catecholamines* are released, generating a rush of energy that lasts for minutes. Second, an adrenocortical arousal is created that can put a child on edge and keep him there for hours, sometimes days. This explains why children (including Eric) are more likely to erupt in anger over something relatively innocuous if the incident is preceded by an earlier upsetting experience. Though the two events may be completely unrelated, the anger generated by the second incident builds on the anger left over from the first. Irritation turns to anger, anger to rage, and rage erupts in violence.

Contrary to what many of us used to believe, when it comes to anger "letting it all out" is *not* helpful. Acting on anger will generally make a child angrier, and each angry outburst will prolong and deepen the distress.

What does work is to teach children to keep a lid on their feelings while they buy some time. If children wait until they have cooled down, they can confront the other person calmly. When flooded with negative emotions the ability to hear, think, and speak are severely impaired. Taking a "time out" can be enormously constructive. However 5 minutes is not enough; research suggests that people need at least 20 minutes to recover from intense physiological arousal.

Research has also shown quite conclusively that it's possible for a child to keep an angry mood going (and growing) just by thinking (and talking) about it.

*Remembered or imagined experiences can create the same flood of chemistry as the experience itself*

—Ellen Langer

Harvard University, 1986

*Thinking about a stressful situation produces the same bodily and mental responses as the experience itself.*

—American Medical Association

Annual Research Conference, 1993

The longer a child dwells on what made her angry, the more reasons and self-justifications she can find for being angry. So when encouraging children to talk about their feelings, we need to be careful not to fan the flames.

Brooding fuels anger, but seeing things differently quells it. Reframing a situation is one of the most potent ways of controlling emotions.

## Sadness: Shifting Gears

Depression and sadness are low-arousal states. When a child is sad, it's as though a master gauge has turned down everything: mouth, eyes, head, shoulders, speech, energy, motivation, desire. Taking a jog is probably the last thing the child feels like doing, but by forcing himself out the door and down the path, he will experience a lift.

The key seems to be shifting the mind from a low-arousal state to a high-arousal state. Exercise and positive distracting activities, like seeing a funny movie, turn up the master gauge, relieving sadness, melancholy, and mild depression. Another way to accomplish the shift is to engineer a small success, such as improving a skill, winning a game, or completing a project.

Humor is great at lifting children out of the doldrums and can add significantly to their creativity and ability to solve problems, too. In studies documenting the effects of humor, people were able to think more broadly, associate more freely, and generate more creative solutions and decisions after hearing a joke.

The ability of humor to boost creativity and improve decision making stems from the fact that memory is "state specific." When we're in a good mood, we come up with more positive solutions and decisions. When we're in a bad mood, the alternatives we generate reflect our negativity.

Choosing to watch cartoons, shoot baskets, ride a bike, or spend a few minutes on the computer is a decision that takes place in the neocortex. The amygdala can't be stopped from generating sadness and melancholy, but children can teach their neocortex a way out of the gloom.

## Relationship Skills

If they are fortunate, children are surrounded by people who give them attention, are actively involved in their lives, and model healthy, responsible interpersonal behavior. Core skills in the art of relationships are empathy, listening, mastery of nonverbal cues, and the ability to manage the emotions of others — to make accurate interpretations, respond appropriately, work cooperatively, and resolve conflicts.

Howard Gardner's theory of multiplicity intelligence includes two personal intelligences, *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal*. People with high interpersonal intelligence have the capacity to discern and respond appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires of others. Intrapersonal intelligence gives people ready access to their own feeling life, the ability to discriminate among their emotions, and accurate awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.

The personal intelligences equip children to monitor their own expressions of emotion, attune to the ways others react, fine-tune their social performance to have the desired effect, express unspoken collective sentiments and guide groups toward goals. Personal intelligence is the basis of leadership.

Lacking personal intelligence, young people are apt to make poor choices related to such important decisions as who to befriend, emulate, date, and marry, what skills to develop and what career to pursue.

### Components of Interpersonal Intelligence

- **Organizing groups:** directing, producing, leading activities and organizations
- **Negotiating solutions:** mediating, preventing and resolving conflicts, deal-making, arbitrating
- **Personal connections:** reading emotions and responding appropriately to the feelings and needs of others; teaming, cooperating
- **Social analysis:** insightful concerning the motives, concerns and feelings of others; able to size up situations

### Components of Intrapersonal Intelligence

- **Self-knowledge and analysis:** having an accurate model of oneself and using that model to operate effectively in life; understanding own values, attitudes, habits, belief systems, strengths, weaknesses, and the motives that drive actions
- **Access to feelings:** the ability to discriminate among feelings and draw upon them to guide behavior; to identify and respond appropriately to own emotions
- **Personal organization:** the ability to clarify goals, plan, motivate, and follow through
- **Impulse control:** the ability to delay gratification; to deny impulse in the service of a goal
- **Fantasy and creativity:** the ability to nurture a rich and rewarding inner life

**Empathy.** All social skills are built on a base of emotional attunement, on the capacity for empathy. The ability to "walk in another's moccasins" is the foundation of caring and altruism. Violent people lack empathy.

Empathy is an outgrowth of self-awareness. The more we are able to understand our own emotions, the more skilled we are at understanding and responding to the emotions of others. Empathy plays heavily in making moral judgments. Sharing their pain, fear, or neglect is what moves us to help people in distress. Putting ourselves in the place of others motivates us to follow moral principles — to treat others the way we want to be treated.

These abilities have little to do with rational intelligence. Studies have shown that students with high levels of empathy are among the most popular, well adjusted, and high performing students, yet their IQs are no higher than those of students who are less skilled at reading nonverbal cues.

Empathy begins to develop very early in life. When infants and children under two witness the upset of another child, they react as if the distress were their own. Seeing another child cry is likely to bring them to tears and send them to a parent's arms.



From about the age of two on, when children begin to grasp the concept of their own separateness, they typically seek to console a distressed child by giving toys, petting, or hugging. In late childhood, they are able to view distress as an outgrowth of a person's condition or station in life. At this stage of development, children are capable of empathizing with entire groups such as the poor, the homeless, and victims of war.

Empathy can be developed through various forms of perspective-taking. In conflict situations, children can be asked to listen to each other's feelings and point of view, and then to feed back or summarize the opposing perspective. Imagining the feelings of characters in literature as well as figures from current events and history is also effective. Combining role playing with these strategies makes them even more powerful.

**Nonverbal Communication Skills.** The mode of communication used by the rational mind is words; the mode preferred by the emotional mind is nonverbal. We telegraph and receive excitement, happiness, sorrow, anger, and all the other emotions through facial expressions and body movements. When words contradict these nonverbal messages — "I'm fine," hissed through clenched teeth — nine times out of ten we can believe the nonverbal and discount the verbal.

Acting out various feelings teaches children to be more aware of nonverbal behavior, as does identifying feelings from videos, photos, and illustrations.

Emotions are contagious and transferrable. When two children interact, the more emotionally expressive of the pair readily transfers feelings to the more passive. Again, this transfer is accomplished *nonverbally*.

Children with high levels of emotional intelligence are able to attune to other children's (and adult's) moods and bring others under the sway of their own feelings, setting the emotional tone of an interaction.

Guided by cultural background, children learn certain display rules concerning the expression of emotions, such as minimizing or exaggerating particular feelings, or substituting one feeling for another, as when a child displays confidence while feeling confused. As educators in a multiethnic, multiracial society, we need to be sensitive to a variety of cultural display rules, and help students gain a similar awareness.

**Listening.** Through listening, children learn empathy, gather information, develop cooperative relationships, and build trust. Skillful listening is required for engaging in conversations and discussions, negotiating agreements, resolving conflicts and many other emotional and cognitive competencies.

Few skills have greater and more lasting value than listening. Unfortunately, listening skills are generally learned by happenstance, not by direct effort. The vast majority of children and adults are either unable or unwilling to listen attentively and at length to another person.

Research shows that poor listening impedes learning and destroys comprehension. However, when students are taught to listen effectively, both comprehension and academic performance go up, along with classroom cooperation and self-esteem. Listening facilitates both emotional learning and relearning — strengthening and refining the analytical and corrective functions of the neocortex.

**Conflict Management.** Schools are rife with opportunities for conflict. From the farthest reaches of the playground to the most remote corners of the classroom, from student restrooms to the teacher's lounge, a thousand little things each day create discord. The causes are many.

Children bring to school an accumulation of everything they've learned — all of their habits and all the beliefs they've developed about themselves, other people, and their world. Such diversity makes conflict inevitable. And because the conflict-resolution skills of most children are poorly developed, the outcomes of conflict are frequently negative — at times even destructive.

Diversity also breeds conflict. Learning to understand, respect and appreciate similarities and differences is one key to resolving conflicts. Unfortunately most of us learn as children that there is only one right answer. From the moment this fallacious notion receives acceptance, the mind closes and vision narrows.

Prejudice cannot be eliminated, but the emotional learning underlying prejudice can be *relearned*. One way to accomplish relearning is to engineer projects and activities in which diverse groups work together to obtain common goals. Social cliques, particularly hostile ones, intensify negative stereotypes. But when children work together as equals to attain a common goal — on committees, sports teams, performing groups — stereotypes break down.

Peer mediation programs offer another excellent avenue for relearning ineffective emotional responses to conflict. Mediators act as models, facilitators and coaches, helping their classmates develop listening, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills.

## Educating the Emotional Brain

Emotional intelligence is a core competence. To raise the level of social and emotional skills in students, schools need to focus on the emotional aspects of children's lives, which most currently ignore.

Unfortunately, in classes that stress subject-matter mastery, teaching is often devoid of emotional content. Too many educators believe that if somehow students master school subjects, they will be well prepared for life. Such a view suffers from a shallow and distorted understanding of how the human brain functions.

Joan Caulfield and Wayne Jennings, experts in brain-based education, specify four building blocks for incorporating emotional intelligence concepts in schools:

1. Safety, security, unconditional love and nurturing for every child
2. Stimulating classroom environments which provide rich sensory input to the brain
3. Experiential learning; opportunities to engage skills, knowledge and attitudes in a wide variety of real life tests
4. Useful and timely performance feedback

Many of the competencies that should be addressed by educational programs in emotional literacy have been specified on the previous pages. A number of outlines are suggested by Goleman in his book, *Emotional Intelligence*. One of the most useful comes from Peter Salovey, a Yale psychologist whose list of

emotional competencies includes five domains and incorporates Howard Gardner's theories on interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences.

1. **Knowing one's emotions:** Self awareness — recognizing a feeling as it happens.  
Monitoring feelings from moment to moment
2. **Managing emotions:** Emotional competence. Handling feelings; ability to recover quickly from upsets and distress;
3. **Motivating oneself:** Marshaling emotions in order to reach goals; self-control and self-discipline; delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness
4. **Recognizing emotions in others:**  
Empathy — the ability to recognize, identify, and feel what another is feeling.
5. **Handling relationships:** The ability to manage emotions in others; social competence; leadership skills

To be most effective, emotional literacy content and processes should be applied consistently across the curriculum and at all grade levels. Children should be afforded many opportunities for skill practice, through a combination of dedicated activities and the countless unplanned "teachable moments" that occur daily. When emotional lessons are repeated over and over, they are reflected in strengthened neural pathways in the brain. They become positive habits that surface in times of stress.