Social and Emotional Learning

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Introduction

What skills are the best predictors of academic and life success? Why is it that some children grow up to be fulfilled adults in challenging careers and satisfying relationships, while other children, from apparently similar backgrounds and academic performance, struggle in relationships, dead-end careers and depressions? A growing number of educators recognize that students who receive an exclusively academic education may be ill-equipped for future challenges, both as individuals and members of society -- it's just not enough to feed only the mind. The field of social and emotional learning (SEL) has emerged from these new understandings of the nature of biology, emotions and intelligence and their relation to success and happiness. Through social and emotional learning children's emotional intelligence (EQ) is bolstered, giving them an enormous edge in their personal and professional futures.

What is Emotional Intelligence (EQ)?

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is not a new concept; it was around as long ago as Socrates, who had these wise words of advice: Know Thyself. Hundreds of years later, we have begun to formalize Socrates' philosophies into what has become known as social and emotional learning (SEL), the learning process by which we can aspire to a higher EQ. Studies show that EQ is the best predictor of a child's future achievement; better than any other single factor. EQ is a better predictor of success than IQ and technical skills combined. In the 1980s, Howard Gardner, in his important work on multiple intelligences, outlined the presence of seven domains of intelligence; two of them were interpersonal and intrapersonal - these combined were the forerunner of what we now know as emotional intelligence. The term was first coined by Peter Salovey, professor and psychologist at Yale University, and John Mayer, professor and psychologist at the University of New Hampshire. In 1995 Daniel Goleman, the leading expert in this field, reported "IQ is only a minor predictor of success in life, while emotional and social skills are far better predictors of success and well-being than academic intelligence."

Brushing up on Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman's exceptional reporting and culling of research on social and emotional competencies in his 1995 book Emotional Intelligence, brought this concept into a much needed focus.

Goleman's work teaches us that children's emotional and social skills can be cultivated, so that the child will accrue both short-term and long-term advantages in regard to well-
being, performance and success in life. He outlines five crucial emotional competencies basic to social and emotional learning:

1. Self and other awareness: understanding and identifying feelings; knowing when one's feelings shift; understanding the difference between thinking, feeling and acting; and understanding that one's actions have consequences in terms of others' feelings.

2. Mood management: handling and managing difficult feelings; controlling impulses; and handling anger constructively

3. Self-motivation: being able to set goals and persevere towards them with optimism and hope, even in the face of setbacks

4. Empathy: being able to put yourself "in someone else's shoes" both cognitively and affectively; being able to take someone's perspective; being able to show that you care

5. Management of relationships: making friends, handling friendships; resolving conflicts; cooperating; collaborative learning and other social skills

The mastery of these five competencies results in enhanced emotional intelligence

Social emotional learning in action

Dr. Maurice Elias, a leading child psychologist, researcher and expert on SEL from Rutgers University, explains the dangers of omitting social-emotional programs from our children's classrooms. He maintains that "many of the problems in our schools are the result of social and emotional malfunction and debilitation from which too many children have suffered and continue to bear the consequences. Children in class who are beset by an array of confused or hurtful feelings cannot and will not learn effectively. In the process of civilizing and humanizing our children, the missing piece is, without doubt, social and emotional learning. Protestations that this must be outside of and separate from traditional schooling are misinformed, harmful and may doom us to continued frustration in our academic mission and the need for Herculean efforts in behavioral damage control and repair. The roster of social casualties will grow ever larger."

Emotional well-being is "dramatically and positively predictive not only of academic achievement, but also of satisfactory and productive experiences in the world of work and marriage, even of better physical health."

In a recent evaluation of the Atlanta-based Resolving Conflict Creatively (RCCP), a multi-school project which has social-emotional learning techniques at the core of its pedagogy, ...."there was generally less school violence, and there was increased self-esteem, improved abilities to help others, and greater personal responsibility for resolving conflicts among participating youngsters. After only two years of implementation, there were substantial improvements in participating schools' course failure, dropout, student attendance and suspension rates." Dr. Stanley J. Schneider, Senior Vice President of Metis Associates.
These insights from experts have alerted educators to the critical value of holistic education, which involves the stimulation and training of both a child's cognitive and affective development. By strengthening and increasing social-emotional educational opportunities, we will increase our children's capacity to learn, give them the tools to aspire to personal and professional achievements, and enable them to experience personal satisfaction.

Self-understanding and greater emotional management coupled with the ability to deal wisely and effectively with others, positively impacts people's capacity to negotiate their everyday lives. Researchers and psychologists maintain that social and emotional competencies "allow us to modulate emotions, solve social problems creatively, to be effective leaders and collaborators, (and) to be assertive and responsible." The good news is that social and emotional skills can be learned and enhanced at any age. Infants, children and adults alike can develop their social and emotional understanding; however, the earlier a person beings the SEL process, the greater the advantages.

**How to integrate social and emotional learning into a child's life**

Many schools are implementing and infusing social and emotional learning competency building into their daily curriculum; many educators are honing their social and emotional skills through workshops and self study, and parents too can bring social and emotional learning into their daily lives.

**Some tips for parents**

6. The earlier emotional education begins, the better. Being attentive to the social and emotional needs of your infants, toddlers, and young children is a great way to start them off and will make the transition to adolescence easier.

7. Start a PTA SEL discussion group, attend SEL workshops and on-line chats.

8. Be a role model. Providing your child with social and emotional competent parenting makes it easier for children to emulate your pro SE behavior.

9. Build a language between you and your child which involves talking about feelings; describe your feelings out loud; ask how your kids feel; teach your child that he can have two feelings at the same time.

10. Applaud your child's efforts to improve her EQ.

11. Look for teachable moments that occur naturally in your day-to-day life, moments that enable you to discuss moods, conflict resolution or managing feelings with your child.

12. Be aware that you can teach emotional competency through personal stories, current events, discussions of movies or web sites. Recognize and talk about prosocial and unintelligent social and emotional behaviors from these media.

13. Keep a journal which will help you to become more reflective about your emotional self and encourage your children to do the same.

14. Look for toys and products which are pro-social and build emotional competencies.

**Some tips for educators**

1. Integrate SEL skills into the daily curriculum.

2. Exhibit pro-social and emotionally intelligent behavior to your students.
3. Investigate successful SEL programs, such as The Social Decision Making and Problem-Solving Program or The Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program and talk to educators currently implementing these programs.

4. Look for ways that technology can enhance and jump start discussions in classrooms on social-emotional competencies, such as computer games and videos.

5. Be alert to teachable moments that occur naturally in the classroom; for example: moments when you notice a shift in mood, a conflict, a caring act.

6. Value social and emotional intelligence in your students as highly as you value their cognitive development.

7. Create reflections of emotional competency building in your classrooms. For example: a bulletin board with full feeling vocabulary, a bulletin board for student to student compliments or issues to be talked about.

8. Check with other teachers about what classroom strategies they have used to boost social and emotional competencies for their students.

9. Participate in SEL forums, conferences, website SEL dialogues and chatrooms.

10. Keep a journal which will allow you to be more reflective about your emotional self, and encourage your students to keep a journal.

Check out the CASEL website or the website for the Center for Social and Emotional Education (See Resources.)

**Some tips for students**

15. Keep a journal to increase your self-awareness and self-reflection.

16. Use "self talk" to encourage yourself; be your own best friend NOT your worst critic.

17. Encourage friends to tell you their points of view on issues.

18. Pay attention to strategies you can use to calm yourself and shift your mood from negative to positive.

19. Be aware of your "buttons," the things that make you angry and upset, and think about ways to deal with them.

20. Find opportunities to cooperate and engage in collaboration with peers.

21. Listen to your instincts: when with a friend or a significant other, if your gut says that there's something wrong - there is!

22. Take quiet, alone time every day to listen to your inner voice. Be attentive to your own social and emotional needs.

23. Notice people and places that make you feel good and those that don't.

**Words from an expert**

It is crucial to provide children with an environment that allows them to develop their social and emotional skills. In a November 6, 1999 speech delivered at a conference on Social and Emotional Learning and Digital Technology, Dr. James Comer, a national leader in social and emotional learning told a group at Columbia Teachers College about the impact a child's school and home settings can have on his/her development. Comer explains that an atmosphere that provides support for one's social and emotional learning and competence versus one that does not can make a huge difference in that child's life. The difference, Comer claims, is equal to the difference in the outcome of throwing seeds on cement versus planting seeds in enriched soil. And what a difference that is!
About the Author
Robin Stern, Ph.D. is the Director for New Media Research and Development at the Center for Social and Emotional Education at Teacher's College, Columbia University. Dr. Stern is an educator and a psychological consultant on issues of women and technology in schools, corporations, museums and digital media companies. Dr. Stern's research interests are in the use of technologies to enhance emotional competency and in the area of young women and leadership.

References and Related Books
Educating Minds and Hearts. Social Emotional Learning and Passage into Adolescence  J. Cohen  Teachers College Press 1999
Comer, J. (Nov.1999). Speech at Columbia University, Teachers College.
Emotionally Intelligent Parenting  M. Elias, S.E. Tobias, B.S. Friedlander  Random House 1999
Emotional Intelligence  D. Goleman  Bantam Books 1995

AboutOurKids Related Articles
Challenges for the Next Century: Raising Responsive and Responsible Children
Resources and Supporters of SEL Education
CASEL Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning: 312-413-1008; Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.
CSEE Center for Social and Emotional Education: 212-570-1075
RCCP Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program: 212-509-0022: www.esrnational.org
SDMPS Social Decision Making and Problem Solving: (732)235-9279; www.umdnj.edu/spsweb/
Emotionally Intelligent Parenting: eqparenting.com
Communities of Hope: www.communitiesofhope.org
Six Seconds: www.6seconds.org

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