

Role of Emotional Intelligence in Teaching

Dr. Bindu Chhabra*

The construct of Emotional Intelligence is of great significance in education and teaching as it helps the teachers understand their students in a better way. They can then align their pedagogy to meet the needs and aspirations of the students. Empathy, a key EI concept, is necessary for the teachers to understand and impart the learning in a way suited to the background and culture of the students. The social skills and motivation are useful for the teachers to achieve the ultimate objectives of the subject being taught. EI can also help improve the achievements of students and offer them skills for their personal and professional lives. Teachers and institutions which incorporate the concept of EI, not only produce happier and well rounded students but also the ones who are better adjusted and more successful.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Emotional Intelligence was made popular by the success of Goleman's book Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ, which appeared in 1995. Goleman defined emotional intelligence or 'EQ' as 'the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships' (Goleman, 1998a). In his article "What makes a Leader" (Goleman, 1998b), he emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence for leadership effectiveness and success in life. The idea has a huge relevance in teaching and education where the application of EI competencies can make the experience of learning an enjoyable and fruitful one. Intellect is generally seen as the centre for rational thought and is considered more important than emotions in problem solving and decision making. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." Descartes dualism has dominated the educational circles, as more importance is given to "thinking skills" and factors like "affect" (emotion) and action are almost excluded (Brockbank and Mc Gill, 1998). In his book, Descartes' error, Antonio Damasio has shown that, from a neuroscientist's perspective, Descartes was wrong. He demonstrated the central role of emotions in decision making and asserts that "certain aspects of the process of emotions and feelings are indispensable for rationality" (Damasio, 1996).

* Dr. Bindu Chhabra is an Associate Professor, Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute of Management, Delhi.

Emotions are bound up with learning and thus cannot be separated from it. According to Guy Claxton, learning is an intrinsically emotional business (Claxton, 1999). Learning invariably involves curiosity and fascination and sometimes comes after a lot of struggle and failures. In the classroom setting, the potential for strong emotions is heightened because of the perception of competition and the dynamics between the teacher and students and amongst the various students. As a result, the role of teacher becomes extremely important and involves understanding the emotional aspect of learning and using it for teaching and helping the students.

Currently though, many teachers are oblivious of how emotional intelligence impacts their teaching. They might be very knowledgeable and competent in their teaching skills but do not pay attention to the emotional aspect of the teaching/learning dimension. The small things like not addressing students by name, even when the group is small, and not being able to recognize the look of boredom, disinterest and confusion on faces of the students can lose the opportunity for building positive learning environment for the students.

Normally, a good teacher brings two things to the class that is expertise in the subject and the teaching pedagogy. Emotional Intelligence can be developed and employed to complement both the subject expertise and pedagogical skills. The lack of emotional intelligence can seriously diminish the value of knowledge as well as teaching and learning tools.

Goleman(1998) has identified five ‘social and emotional competencies’ which make up Emotional Intelligence. These competencies are:

- Self Awareness Being alert to your feelings
- Self Regulation Managing your feelings
- Motivation Using feelings to help achieve your goals
- Empathy Tuning into how others feel
- Social Skills Handling feelings well in interaction with others

Each of these competencies directly or indirectly affects the teaching and learning environment. Teachers who are in possession of these competencies are able to make the experience of teaching and learning more memorable, enjoyable and intellectually stimulating, both for themselves and for the students.

SELF AWARENESS

Gold and Roth (1993) defined self-awareness as a “process of getting in touch with our own feelings and behaviors.” Increased self-awareness in teachers involves a more accurate understanding of how students affect their emotional processes and behaviors and how their behavior affects students. Teachers are seldom unaffected by the behaviors of their students and often the students bring out the best and the worse in teachers (Richardson, 2001). The development of the teachers, to a large extent, depends on their willingness to take risks and to regularly ask themselves as to which of their behaviors is helping or hindering their personal or professional growth.

Although teachers should be able to recognize the signs of emotional distress in their students, it is equally important for them to acknowledge that their own personalities, learned prejudices and psychological histories have shaped their attitudes and responses to certain behaviors (Long et al, 1996). Awareness of their own emotional triggers improves their chance of making rational decisions based on conscious processes rather than unconscious emotional conditioning. The conscious, ongoing efforts to improve self-awareness can enhance their overall effectiveness and job satisfaction.

SELF REGULATION

Orme (2001) defined self regulation as ‘being able to face disruptive emotions like anger and fear and making choices when you are in the middle of a crisis’. Teaching is a hard profession and unlike many other professions, teachers are constantly exposed to emotionally provocative situations. The deteriorating climate in the classrooms is leading to an increase in the troublesome student behavior, and teachers become emotionally exhausted as they try to manage them. When the feelings are highly aroused and the situation demands a strong emotional reaction, self regulation becomes extremely difficult as the teacher cannot simply excuse herself until she calms down. The teacher has to stay in the classroom with the students and sometimes coping with their own negative emotional response can be a major stressor for the teachers.

Teachers with high level of self regulation are better able to manage their behavior in the classroom and develop and manage nurturing relationships with their students. They serve as behavioral role models for their students and provide outstanding examples of desired social and emotional behavior.

MOTIVATION

Motivation is one of the most important things that a teacher should possess. Students have different kinds of tastes, preferences, fears and inhibitions over the subjects. It is the job of the teacher to create enthusiasm and interest and to remove any fear and inhibition that a student may have towards the subject. This is not possible unless the teacher is herself motivated and passionate about the subject.

Highly motivated teachers find teaching enjoyable and ensure that students enjoy it too. They set high standards for themselves and their students. They expect their students to succeed and feel a keen sense of responsibility for them. Motivation is highly contagious and gets transferred easily from teachers to students and makes the environment of the classroom conducive to learning.

EMPATHY

An empathetic disposition has been seen as a desirable trait for the teachers especially for those working with students from diverse backgrounds. Empathetic teachers often have a caring relationship with their students and this leads to high motivation and better performance of the students. Additionally, empathy can foster openness and flexibility and

because of this, the teachers are better able to modify the pedagogy and curriculum to fit with their students' needs.

Empathy can be developed by encouraging open communication in the classrooms. More emphasis can be laid on cultivating a dialogue than a monologue. In order to get feedback from their students, empathetic teachers encourage them to voice their views and ideas openly to make teaching a two-way process rather than one-way flow of information.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills involve skills like communication, understanding the students, and managing them in order to make the environment in the classroom more conducive to teaching and learning. Teachers are constantly imparting new knowledge, but it is of no use if the students have a difficulty receiving it. To be more effective, teachers should try to get regular feedback from the students in order to know if the students really understand what the teachers are trying to put across. For this, non-verbal communication is as important as the verbal communication. By attending to the body language of the students, the teachers come to know when the students are confused or bored. From the body language of the teachers students pick up if the teachers are confident and enthusiastic. Paying attention to these cues can lead to more flexibility and readiness to respond in teachers. They can change their methodology and pedagogy to suite the students' expectations.

The teachers high on social skills also pay importance to the individual differences in their students as it helps to manage them in a better way. Some students are internally motivated to learn and do not require any external reward or reinforcement. On the other hand, some students will require constant monitoring and optimum use of rewards, reinforcements and sometimes punishment. Some students have to be tackled by the using humor whereas others may have to be dealt with sternly. Understanding these individual differences and dealing with different students in a different way can increase the effectiveness of teaching.

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is not just a personal quality which a person either possesses or not. It can be developed and the individuals have the capacity to change both their interpersonal behavior and how they view themselves and others. Reflecting on what one is looking to change and how that change can be brought about, is important for the teachers seeking to develop their EI. Carl Rogers in his "Freedom to Learn" (1983) said that the teachers who are genuine, empathetic and accepting with their learners would, by that fact alone, bring about change in their learners as they have a genuine desire to create a climate in which there is freedom to learn. He saw procedures and techniques as less important than attitudes.

Emotional Intelligence development serves two broad purposes. One is to recognize and respond to the feelings of oneself and that of students in the classroom. The other is to encourage the emotional state in the learners that is conducive to learning.

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