

Emotional Intelligence: A Panacea to Language Teaching

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Abstract

As emotional intelligence plays an important role in peoples' lives, it can also be extended to language teaching. In this regard, it is indispensable for teachers to know how to develop emotional intelligence. The present paper made an endeavor to provide the ways to develop emotional intelligence. Although the achievement of success is variously defined by different theories, in this theory (i.e., emotional intelligence) success will be achieved when students can control their emotions. What the paper attempts has been to cast lights upon our perception in the behavior that the teachers can employ in order to help students to control their emotions.

Key words: emotional intelligence, empathy, humanism, intelligence, praxis

INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence is not a fad. It is not as new as many people think. It seems novel only because it was shuffled aside, sent into hibernation by the 20th century's fixation on scientific data and rationalism at any cost (Stain & Book, 2006). It is now that emotional intelligence is increasingly recognized as crucial to effective functioning in teaching. One reason for the popular appeal of emotional intelligence "appears to be the high regard for the concept of intelligence as it is a desirable quality that is associated with power, expertise, and prestige" (Pellitteri, 2006, p. 29).

Juxtaposing intelligence and emotion appears to be a potential capacity to use emotional intelligence to facilitate thought (Goleman, 1995, 1998). The term intelligence, from one side, has been defined so diversely. But what Sternberg (1990) suggests is a list of attributes. Some of these attributes are as follows: knowledge, ability to learn, speed of mental processing, ability to deal with novelty, academic abilities, 'g' factor, which is valued by culture, executive processes, not one construct, and metacognition (Sternberg, 1990).

Moreover, Sternberg, elaborating on the distinction between intelligence and intelligent behavior, defines intelligence as a set of stable mental processes used to produce intelligent behavior. From another side, the term emotional, as Pellitteri (2006) puts forth, “has appeal in that emotions are inherent and central to psychosocial functioning, motivation, well-being, and life satisfaction” (P. 29). He continues “emotions make up the fabric of relationships and are embedded to one degree or another in all interpersonal interactions” (p. 29).

Along the same line, Fer (2004) asserts that cognition and affect make up emotional intelligence. As to Fer, the term emotional intelligence is a broad umbrella term referring to inter- and intra-personal skills, being aware of emotions, and using emotional and social abilities. Similarly, Goleman (1995) mentions that the concept of emotional intelligence is concerned with knowing what you feel and using that knowledge in order to make good decisions. With this background, it is time to stand far from theory and delve into practice by suggesting the ways that emotional intelligence can be operationalized in language teaching. In a sense, the paper, from one side, makes an endeavor to provide a quick review of underlying concepts of emotional intelligence, and, from another side, deals with the practical implication of emotional intelligence in language teaching.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The notion of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined by Mortiboys (2005) as the ability “to acknowledge and handle emotions in yourself and in others” (p. 7). To Yeung (2009), emotional intelligence is “the ability to identify, understand and manage moods and feelings in both ourselves and other people” (p. 3). Though the term emotional intelligence was earlier popularized by Goleman (1995), it had been coined in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer who defined emotional intelligence as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s feelings and actions” (p. 189). According to Goleman (1995, 1998), emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to recognize our feelings and people’s. It is the capacity for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. Elsewhere, Salovey and Meyer (1997) contend that emotional intelligence involves the ability:

- to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion;
- to assess and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought;
- to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and
- to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

Parallel to this argument, Moritboys (2005) maintains that teaching with emotional intelligence is conducive to change in learners’ perception. When the teacher puts

energy into getting materials planned and into preparing to meet students' demands, the students will respond to the teacher's action differently. Establishing rapport and empathy from the teachers' side is a necessity that if not met, communication will stop. Thus, a sophisticated degree of empathy is needed. In fact, empathy is the capacity to share and understand another person's state of mind (Ioannidou & Konstantikai, 2008). Put differently, empathy, in contrast with sympathy, involves attachment.

In effect, no methods can exert positive effect on the process of learning if there is no desire on the part of teachers to create a climate that students become free to learn (Rogers, 1983). Thus, setting up a non-defensive environment is indispensable to facilitate the process of learning and teaching. Ioannidou and Konstantikai, further, put that communication becomes fruitful provided that some preliminaries are met, such as:

- Emotional understanding: understanding the problem through the individual's point of view
- Respect: a feeling of admiration for a person
- Authenticity: honesty, real expression of views without hypocrisy
- Warmth and unconditional positive recognition
- Self-exposure: health care professional reports personal experiences from his perspective
- Resolution: health care professional's ability to identify and name patient's feelings. (p. 119)

Presumably, to be emotionally intelligent, the teacher should reach a well-developed self-awareness. According to Jensen (1998, cited Moritboys, 2005, p. 29) "all learning is state dependent". Moritboys maintains that the state you are in is characterized by the collection of emotions you are feeling. He continues, "in a learning state you experience those feelings which are more conducive to learning, for example, valued, curious, safe, relaxed, connected, and motivated" (p.29). Men usually think in the way they think. Thus, in the class, there is a great deal of potential that induces feelings that do not create a learning state. Thus, it is the responsibility of teachers who shape and direct students' feeling in correct paths.

An ideal learning state has been described by Csikszentmihalyi (2002) as flow. Flow refers to the state when you get completely absorbed by a task. In a sense, flow, according to Moritboys (2005), takes place "when there is a balance between your motivation, your ability, and the demands of the task, in a goal-directed, structured context" (p.29). Henceforth, in such a context, anxiety will be stuck to the margin, and there is no doubt that letting students express their feelings from their vantage points is the first steps to recognize the emotional dimensions of their own learning.

Specifically, teacher burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) and stress might impair the quality of teaching, and might also lead to job dissatisfaction, work alienation, physical, and emotional ill-health, and teacher's leaving the profession (Chan, 2006). In fact, as Hyson (2004) asserts,

“programs that lack a strong emotional focus may restrict opportunities to develop individual and culturally compatible interests and styles, because children perform activities in only one stereotyped way” (p. 20). Thus, increasing teachers’ emotional intelligence entails valuing and encouraging individuality as well as students’ collective identities.

Hyson goes on to hold that centering the curriculum on emotions does not require that the entire curriculum has to be about emotions. Just as child-centered does not mean child-dominated (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997, cited in Hyson, 2004). Likewise, to Hyson “emotion-centered does not mean emotion-only” (p. 21). In fact, theories which rely specifically on cognitive aspects lag behind if emotion is respected in vacuum. Emotion and cognition are closely interlinked. More comprehensively, choosing and striving for goals entail integrated systems of cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2002, cited in Turner & Husman, 2008).

Emotional intelligence and humanism

Emotions have been the subject of philosophical inquiry for many centuries. Focusing on students’ emotion has a deep humanistic pedagogy. The philosophy behind humanistic perspective can be investigated from different streams of thought. In this regard, Gadd (1998) makes a distinction between romantic, pragmatic, and rhetorical views towards humanism. Romantic humanists place emphasis on students’ emotions and claim by invoking their inner selves, successful learning will be encouraged. In this regard, Shakouri and Nazari (2012) assert that at the heart of humanism, a sort of freedom in talk is observed. In fact, peace and talk are intertwined. If this democratic talk is valued and students are let talk from their vantage points learning will be facilitated. Pragmatic humanism, according to Gadd (1998), in contrast, argues that understanding students’ motivations, attitudes, reactions, and cognitive strengths and weaknesses is indispensable to respond more effectively to their needs. In a sense, if teachers have a politically clear stance in the class towards their students, learning will be humanized (Shakouri & Nazari, 2012), and henceforth students’ emotional intelligence will be raised since teachers can fulfill their role as the shapers of students’ behaviors. Rhetorical views, also, assert that students must be taught a variety of skills in order to be encouraged to express their feelings.

In his article, Gadd (1998) seems to be claiming that teachers are only concerned with the development of learners’ feelings and inner selves. What is plausible to assert is that to Gadd, we are more concerned with the affective side of human beings rather than the cognitive. In sum, to Gadd, humanism is limited to affect rather than cognition. In this regard, Arnold (1998) claims, “many of the arguments [raised by Gadd (1998)]...are not well-founded” (p. 235). According to Arnold, humanistic theorists “never talk about substituting the cognitive for the affective, but rather about adding the affective...” (p. 237). In effect, considering human beings as whole connotes that both the affective and the cognitive encourage the development of the whole person (Arnold, 1998). However,

one cannot claim that one with high cognitive ability might benefit from the same level of affective ability. But Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence points out that there are individuals with a lower IQ that often do better in life than those with a high IQ. And this ability, according to Goleman, is the same emotional intelligence.

How to develop emotional intelligence?

The success of a person will be guaranteed through emotional intelligence in comparison with those individuals that gain solely high levels of intellectual intelligence (Goleman, 1998). In fact, emotional intelligence liberates individuals to explore their potentials as well as provide opportunities for individuals to harmonize themselves with their emotion (Hassan, Sulaiman, & Ishak, 2009). In a sense, as reported by Hamid (2006), those who have high levels of emotional intelligence can handle well their emotions.

To achieve appropriate emotional control and emotional awareness, young children require many opportunities to observe adult models, a secure base of relationships with others, and loving guidance as they try out their emerging skills in many contexts (Hyson, 2004). In line with education, Mayer and Salovey (1990), in attempts to develop emotional intelligence, suggest the following ideas that a teacher should pay attention to: (a) let students express their feelings instead of ordering the students to stop when they misbehave; (b) take responsibility for feelings instead of imposing them one-sidedly on the students; (c) be much more aware of feelings than the feelings of the students; (d) try to understand the reasons behind students' behavior before forming an opinion about them; (e) find ways of voluntary cooperation instead of making demands of students; and (f) help students to express themselves openly and to solve any problems they may have.

Such a context offered by Mayer and Salovey does not occur in vacuum. For the situation to set up a sophisticated degree of empathy needs. As Brown (2000) declares, to communicate effectively, we need to be able to understand the other persons' affective and cognitive states. Communication breaks when false assumptions are made about the other person's state. To him, empathy is defined as the projection of one's own personality into the personality of another. Empathy implies detachment and is not synonymous with sympathy which implies attachment. In fact, as Sucaromana (2012) puts forth emotional intelligence and achievement have some direct and indirect link with each other. No one denies that when the students' interpersonal skills develop, learning can be enhanced (Elliot, 2003, cited in Sucaromana, 2012). Furthermore, increasing one's emotional intelligence has a direct link with academic achievement that has a significant role on the learning context, on students' cognitive achievement, and on students' effort to be directed in a correct path. But what is necessary to pay heed to is how emotional intelligence can be developed by teachers?

Having emotional intelligence is a necessity on the part of teachers to both provide a non-defensive environment and help students to increase their emotional intelligence. Along the same line, Sucaromana holds “an emotionally intelligent teacher is necessary to have an emotionally intelligent classroom atmosphere” (p. 57). Teachers are always in attempts to see success in their students. The achievement of success is variously defined by different theories. In this theory (i.e., emotional intelligence), success will be achieved when students can control their emotions. So much has been reported on the denotative and connotative meaning of emotional intelligence, but now it is time to delve into the strategies and techniques that students can employ in order to control their emotions. Putting theory aside, it is necessary to ponder upon the strategies that teachers can be practiced to direct students’ emotions. As Freir (1985, cited in Monchinski, 2008) warns “cut-off from practice theory becomes a simple verbalism and separated from theory is nothing but blind activism” (pp. 1-2).

No one denies that the teachers who do not meet students’ emotional needs will not taste success among their students. The inability of teachers to harmonize between their action and theory seems to emerge when the newcomer teachers fail to cope with troublesome students. There is no doubt that every classroom has the students considered a challenge for inexperienced teachers. At some point, the generosity and good will of the teacher is strained, causing those teachers to realize that they are in the center of a power struggle and that it is affecting their teaching and their life outside the classroom. Boice (1996, cited in Carlson, 1997) has coined the term classroom terrorists for these particularly troublesome unruly students. To him, the presence of one or perhaps two classroom terrorists, whose unpredictable and highly emotional outbursts, make the entire class tense. In such classes, even with one classroom terrorist, it is incumbent for teachers to revise their institutional perspective. To Hashwesh (2005, cited in Burton, 2009), an experienced teacher develops scripts that organize experiences, enable recall, and assist plans for future teaching. He also called this ability ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ (p.300).

The ability to be a reflective teacher who makes an endeavor to develop student emotional intelligence shows that when a teacher sticks to the lesson plan, he will not gratify the students’ unmet emotional needs. And the students are usually seen as terrorists or disruptions to the class and to the attainment of the lesson plan. It is felt important to take heed that in order to develop students’ emotional intelligence, a particular kind of relationship is required between the teacher and learners, and among learners. The relationship is one where learners and the teacher engage and work together so that they jointly construct meaning and knowledge with the material. For example, for a dialogue to happen, the teacher must relate differently with learners. In fact, “setting a positive resonance within our... [students] is critically important for school leaders” (Brady, 2006, p. 153) since the emotional health of students is linked with the emotional well-being of teachers. To Giddens (1994, cited in Gergen, 2003), through dialogue, personal relationship develops and trust is set up. In fact, through

dialogues a form of rapport is established between the teacher and students. In a sense, through the process of interaction in a dialogue an activity is shaped which grounds the basis for students to liberate their potential. To Prabhu (1987), the rapport represents a form of empathetic understanding of each other's behavior and is probably more productive of learning than any teaching procedure by itself can be. In fact, as Prabhu asserts, without dialogue, the teacher is forced towards routinization in teaching such that the classroom can easily cease to be a source of interpretable experience.

However, emotional intelligence is highly interconnected with one's anxiety. As Hardy and Parfitt (1991) contend, anxiety is represented as self-perception which is connected with uncertainty towards the ability to overcome the needs of a situation. To increase the level of emotional intelligence, Hassan et al. (2009) suggest that the teacher, besides generating a pleasurable classroom in which students are given chances to interact simultaneously, should reduce the problem of anxiety among students by helping them to increase the low level of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1986), refers to the "beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 392). Along the same vein, Hassan et. al. (2009) reported "when students feel that they are able to handle a task, they are less anxious in doing it [...] students should be given more bareness regarding the skill or the technique to reduce anxiety" (p.101).

Furthermore, involving employees to decision source can get students aware of their efficacy provided that the teachers in the class become politically clear. That is, emotionally, teachers are needed "to provide [students] with clarity about their role in decision processes, particularly in relation to why, how, when, and to what extent they can participate. To do so will facilitate greater commitment and ownership of solution" (Scott-Ladd & Chan, 2004., p. 102).

Last but not the least, for students to control their behavior, they need to be engaged both cognitively and affectively in the process of language acquisition. Without affective and cognitive engagement, there is little possibility of deep processing (Craik & Lockhart, 1972), and therefore little chance of language acquisition. One way to see the engaging effect is to design activities which involve learners' personal experiences, attitudes, and views so that students can be humanistically engaged in praxis (Freire, 1970). Praxis involves a give-and-take relationship between theory and practice—between theorizing practice and practicing theory. In Freire's philosophy, praxis and dialogue are closely related: genuine dialogue represents a form of humanizing praxis. If praxis is to be humanizing, dialogical communication must involve a love of the world and of other human beings.

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is an idea that has leapt to prominence in education over the last twenty years. Emotion is not respected as an antagonist for rationality. The hybrid term

'emotional intelligence' is seemingly ambiguous. Nevertheless, philosophically speaking, emotional intelligence refers to the competence to identify and express emotions, understand emotions, assimilate emotions in thought, and regulate emotions in the self and in others (Lazarus, 1991). Thus, claiming that abstract rationality is part and parcel of intelligence is undeniable, but the stance of emotionality as an epitome of intelligence must not be disregarded. In a nutshell, the concept of emotional intelligence, though brings us back into the discussion of instrumental behaviorism, should be lauded. Henceforth, emotional intelligence, considered as a panacea for the problems of language teaching, is a construct which deserves closer scrutiny and development.

No one denies that teaching is a political act and that a language teacher is an agent for change (Brown, 1994). Brown warns teachers not to push a particular philosophy on our students, but let them negotiate meaning harmoniously. However, teachers must not limit themselves to the development of students' inner selves, but help students to develop the intellectual skills and strategies so that they can cope with their demands in a great variety of situations, and therefore, control their emotions.

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