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A PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH

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He gives special thanks to the school, the teachers who participated in the research and the children.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Children with high levels of emotional intelligence can demonstrate empathy towards others. They can understand how their words, actions and interactions may affect other people. They are compassionate when others are distressed, and they demonstrate emotional understanding when others need them to. Children with low levels of emotional intelligence may be unaware of the feelings of others. They may lack empathy and compassion towards others, and they may not understand the impact that their words and actions can have on other people. They may struggle to name feelings and they may find it difficult to regulate their own feelings. This chapter explores emotional intelligence. It explains the meaning of emotional intelligence and provides you with some practical strategies for developing emotional intelligence in the classroom.

Chapter Objectives

This chapter will help you to understand:

- what we mean by emotional intelligence
- ways of developing children's emotional intelligence.



Reflection point

Emotional intelligence relates to a child's ability to recognise their own and others' emotions, the effect they are having on themselves and others, and then to manage their emotions so that they can adapt to different people and situations. This is extremely challenging in a primary school setting when you are working with children who are not yet mature enough to have developed their empathy and ability to consider the philosophical. Consider how well you are able to recognise your own emotions and how you manage them with others. There are likely to be circumstances when you are expected to behave in a certain way and not express your emotions. Consider how you behave at school: often we are more 'ourselves' before the children come into school whilst we are chatting with other teachers who are also potentially our friends; however, as soon as the children arrive, we put on a professional persona and are expected to hide our emotions. How easy do you find this? Now you have analysed your own emotional profile, how easy do the children in your class find this? This is what we are exploring in the case studies in this chapter.

Key Theories

Children with autism struggle to understand emotions because they do not have a theory of mind. This means that they find it difficult to interpret other people's emotions and they may not understand how their words and actions can affect other people. This may result in their saying something which is quite literal, but nevertheless upsetting to another person. Children with autism may need a structured emotional curriculum to support them in understanding emotions.

Emotional intelligence has been defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997: 10) as:

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

Work on emotional intelligence in schools has been inspired by the work of Howard Gardner and Daniel Goleman. Gardner developed his theory of multiple intelligences at a time when people understood intelligence to equate with high IQ scores. He identified two intelligences which relate to emotional intelligence (Gardner, 1983):

- Intrapersonal intelligence: the ability to understand one's own feelings and emotions.
- Interpersonal intelligence: the ability to differentiate the emotions of others.

Goleman's work (1996) on emotional intelligence has been applied in the world of business, particularly in relation to leadership styles. However, it has been popular across the education sector, gaining application through social and emotional learning programmes in schools, and it has also been applied to the concept of the emotionally intelligent school leader. These theorists have both made a significant contribution to our understanding of intelligence. No longer is intelligence solely based on a narrow range of skills which are assessed through the IQ test (e.g. mathematical skills, logic and reasoning). Thanks to their contribution to the field, we now recognise that intelligence is a multi-faceted construct and that people can be intelligent in different domains.

Theory into Practice

Some children do not have the vocabulary to describe how they are feeling. Through providing children with an emotional curriculum you can introduce them to a range of different feelings including happiness, sadness, frustration, jealousy, anger, anxiety and so on. You can help children to recognise these feelings in themselves and others through consideration of the ways in which feelings can affect other people. Through an emotional curriculum, children can be taught how they can regulate their feelings. For example, they can be taught some simple strategies for managing anger. Children can also be taught about the importance of expressing their feelings by talking about how they feel to other people. This is particularly important because some children may have developed a belief that it is not appropriate to talk about their feelings. This is not healthy, and as adults we know that talking about how we feel can be significantly beneficial and reduce mental ill health. Through providing a curriculum that addresses emotions, children can learn about the concept of empathy. They can be taught how to listen and respond to others when they are demonstrating characteristics associated with their feelings.

There is a range of story books now available that teach children about emotions. Young children respond well to stories, and a story can be used as stimulus for a rich discussion. Children can be taught some simple mindfulness activities to manage stress or anxiety. Simple breathing exercises can reduce stress and anxiety. Children can be taught to release their anger in positive ways through engaging in physical activity or different meaningful tasks. Role-play activities can be used so that children can rehearse how they might respond to other people's feelings. Puppets are also a useful way of introducing feelings to young children; you can introduce a story to explain why the puppet is sad, angry or jealous, and you can then open a discussion with the children about how they might help the puppet.

Case study 6.1

Early Years

Child A is new to Nursery and is an only child who has not had a lot of exposure to other children at home. They are exhibiting a longer transition into Nursery than other children and difficulty separating from carers. Whilst this comes across initially as immaturity, the child has a broad vocabulary and has experienced many positive life experiences with their parents and carers. Their profile when the Nursery teacher carried out the flower exercise for emotional intelligence was initially amber and red as the child was not used to having to adapt their behaviour or emotions to accommodate other children, but the teacher put in place opportunities for them to develop this.

One of these activities included the parent or carer who came with the child in the morning – this was designed to help the adult model language and emotions with the child at home as well as acting as an emotional ‘barometer’ of the class. The teacher had placed a mirror on the self-registration table with lots of cut-out faces – these were simply circles cut out with either a smile, frown, downturned or squiggly mouth. They were not photographs because the teacher did not want the children to look at other comparisons (e.g. gender, hair or skin colour, clothes etc.) but wanted parents/carers and the children to focus their attention on their own mouth and mirror this with the cards.

Initially child A always chose the squiggly mouth because it was their ‘favourite’; it did not reflect how they were feeling, and even if they were able to say they felt ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ they would still choose this face. The temptation was to remove this mouth from the pile to force them to choose another face, but the teacher felt this would not address the underlying issue that the child had in recognising their emotions and finding vocabulary to describe them. What the teacher did instead was to provide a dry marker pen to the adult and the child was provided their own small mirror in the mornings so that when they looked in the mirror the adult would draw the child’s mouth. Throughout the day and across a few days, the mirror was regularly changed so that the child could see that over a period of time their expression changed. They knew it was them and they could see the differences. The next stage was to name these differences – they could not all be happy or sad, different words were needed. As the child had a good general vocabulary, it did not take long for them to learn new words for emotions. Initially they did not get the appropriate term matched to each face, but the objective at first was for them to recognise and name differences and then to finesse their language to suit how they were feeling, not just what they looked like.

Case study 6.2

Key Stage 1

In Year 2, the teacher has an emotions ‘shopping line’ of pictures of children exhibiting different emotions. At the beginning of the year the children discussed the pictures and

the emotions being portrayed. The words were then attached to the pictures, and when the child entered the room in the morning they would get the peg with their name on and clip it to the appropriate picture. This provided an opportunity for the teacher or teaching assistant to assess whether there were any children who would need a chat to work out why they felt a negative emotion once the others were settled with their work. As a few of the children in the year were extremely vulnerable due to individual needs and child protection issues, this was a useful tool in knowing when to intervene. To extend this as an opportunity to develop emotional intelligence, the teacher chose an emotion picture every now and then and explored with the children how this made them feel, physically as well as emotionally. For example if the chosen picture was 'nervous', it would provide a good opportunity to explore with the class how they feel when they are nervous. For children with a small vocabulary for emotions, trying to explain what nervous is can be difficult, so having more able peers describe 'butterflies' or 'tingling' helps them to try to explain how they feel. One teacher included their own emotion on the shopping line to show the children that adults feel different emotions too.

Child B was not keen on the shopping line; they did not want to describe how they felt. They had behaviour challenges which, it was thought, were caused by being on the autistic spectrum but, at this point, that was not confirmed. The teacher did not ignore this avoidance of Child B to engage in the activity but found another means of expression. The child was able to read well, so their task in the morning was to match some photos to emotion words. This took the focus away from the child itself and provided a good opportunity to discuss the emotions rather than the child having to identify with how they, or their peers, were feeling. Once they demonstrated a good understanding of this, the teacher included some pictures of the child so they could see their own expression of different emotions and they could label them appropriately.

Case study 6.3

Key Stage 2

In a circle the children were asked to reflect on things that made them feel different emotions. They recorded the different words on large sheets of paper. Once everyone had a chance to record their words and express their reflections on what made them feel that way, the teacher put out mindfulness picture postcards around the circle. The postcards included pictures of places, people, families, abstract art, colour, animals – they were not obviously linked to emotions or to the children's life experiences. The point of the exercise was for children to choose pictures instinctively based on the emotions they were describing. Child C had a broadly green profile for emotional intelligence; they were sensitive to other children's feelings and managed their own well. The only area that the teacher was concerned about was how far the child

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controlled their emotions, seeming to catastrophise negative emotions that emerged mostly when they had been rejected by friends; for example, if the child's friend had decided that they wanted to play with another group, Child C became almost inconsolable. Yet when the friend was sad about something, they demonstrated great empathy and support. The teacher wanted to see which pictures Child C selected to see if it gave some information around why they handled these situations in a certain way. The teacher asked the children to find a picture that, for them, reflected an emotion of happiness, then asked them to find anger, and finally frustration. The children then had some thinking time to reflect on why they had chosen each image – they had not been given much time to choose so that it was more of an impulse than a considered action. They discussed with partners why they had chosen each picture. The teacher partnered with Child C so that they could explore the choices. Happiness had been an easy choice – a bright sunny day; anger was an obvious one as it was an adult wagging their finger; but frustration was interesting as the child had chosen something more abstract. On talking with the child, the teacher ascertained that the image had appealed to Child C because it just jumped out at her, not because it particularly expressed the emotion of frustration which they could not see in the cards. The teacher had expected the child to be able to find this emotion in an image, but they had not been keen to. They explored why the child was attracted to the image a bit further, and they said that it made them feel 'warm inside' or nurtured. The teacher wrote down this information and the reflections that the other children made, and then a couple of children for each emotion tacked their pictures against the words on the big sheet.

Learning from the Case Studies

Early Years

It is not unusual for teachers to have reflection areas in which children are asked to look in a mirror and record their emotions. This is an effective way to draw children in to expressing themselves and to realise that not everyone feels the same. With the Foundation Stage curriculum, children who reach the Early Learning Goal for personal and social development have to 'show sensitivity to others' needs and feelings' (DfE, 2012), which starts with them recognising that there are different feelings to happy and sad and recognising them within themselves. Using mirrors to represent expressions highlighted for the teacher that the nuances of different emotions are very difficult for some young children; they experience emotions as good or bad, not as having arisen from a particular situation. Therefore they do not make the connection parents do that their child is having a tantrum not just because they are angry but because they are tired or they are frustrated that no one seems to understand their

needs. The teacher went on to use this in their descriptions of incidents in the classroom so the children were taught how to link incidents to feelings and then to the impact on the feelings of others.

Key Stage 1

Children with ASD will, to varying degrees, have difficulty recognising emotions. Due to the areas of need relating to social interaction, social communication and sensory overload, a child with ASD could find it too difficult to recognise how others are feeling and what the 'normal' response is to those emotions. Often their reaction to a situation is impacted by their response to the sensory characteristics (e.g. how noisy it is, lighting, activity) and they experience high anxiety. The teacher in this situation realised that Child B could be taught what signs to look for to recognise an emotion in another child; this was a sophisticated analysis as it could lead to Child B being able to respond appropriately to a given situation even if they were not feeling how children of more typical development might. The teacher was exploiting Child B's ability to read and learn to imprint images of children expressing different emotions and then helping them learn how the other child would expect Child B to react. This had some impact with Child B straight away when they said that a child who was crying was feeling 'very sad'.

Key Stage 2

The teacher in this case study had not recognised that Child C had attachment issues as they appeared highly emotionally literate in other situations and they did not openly display any distress when separating from carers at the beginning of the school day. But the reason for this was not that the child did not feel any anxiety, but because they had developed effective means of managing their emotions to outwardly express calm and happiness. This was a fascinating case as it appears to negate the statements in the profile. Is it really possible to know how a child feels? What the teacher learned through this case study was that different children needed different tactics to demonstrate their understanding of how and why they feel as they do. Child C's profile had been green, but it was clear that underneath the green there were hidden some amber and red traits. As Child C was articulate, once the teacher had found a way in – through the card choosing – to discuss the emotions evoked by the images, they could discuss the situation in the abstract of the card, but actually find out the concrete of how the child feels. The teacher carried out the task with all children and, as they were matching cards to emotions, they listened to see if there were any further confusions or inferences that would guide their development of intrapersonal understanding with the group.

Applying the Case Studies to Your Own Practice

Step 1: Complete the statements for three children who you would describe as across the spectrum of emotional intelligence

To complete the profile, colour from the centre of the flower so statement 1 is the first stripe to statement 5 being the tip of the petal. If the statement describes the child perfectly then you should colour it green, to some extent in orange and not at all in red.

Statements related to emotional intelligence:

- 1 Is aware of their own emotional state.
- 2 Is aware of the emotional state of others.
- 3 Is aware of the emotional response expected in different situations.
- 4 Has empathy for their peers.
- 5 Has the vocabulary to describe their emotions.

Statement 3 is quite a difficult one to judge in some children as their emotional response may be hiding underlying emotions. For example, a child in Year 3 tends to smile when being reminded about their behaviour, when the 'response expected' would more typically be serious or even upset. This 'inappropriate' response is actually shielding them from the embarrassment they felt having their misdemeanours highlighted. These anomalies can arise from a cultural perspective or from a special educational need. Getting to know the children well as individuals will enable you to make these observations.

Step 2: Carry out the following activity

This activity relies on good weather and dry conditions, so that the children can lie on the playground or field, but not too bright as the children will be looking into the sky. Take the children outside and get them to lie on the playground or field. Carry out a relaxation exercise so all the children are calm and able to concentrate, not distracted by others. The idea of the activity is that the children are focusing on their position in the universe. When all the children are calm and ready, ask them to look into the sky. They need to concentrate on just looking at the sky, not on anything in front of them like buildings. The idea is that as they focus just on the sky they begin to recognise how small they are in the world around them. The exercise is carried out in silence as you do not want to put preconceived images into their heads but allow them to experience their own emotion about it. If you are able to take music out with you it can help, as quiet music can distract from any noises like other children or traffic which remind the children where they are.

After a few minutes, you ask the children to either write the words to express how they are feeling or draw images, patterns or colours, again keeping them silent as it needs to reflect their own response and not someone else's. On their return to the classroom note down what the children have said and drawn; see if they recognise the feelings of smallness that was the intention of the exercise. Emotional intelligence development includes opening children to new experiences that cannot be described as good or bad, happy or sad. If the children have struggled to express how they felt, that is not a bad thing as you want to work together to find new words that the children may have not used before.

The session works well if being used as part of a religious or spiritual development session. Children experience what we call 'awe and wonder', where the child feels that they are part of something bigger than themselves which we cannot fully appreciate or describe. On their return to the classroom the children can create mindfulness quotes or inspirational phrases or prayers, dependent upon the focus of the lesson. The statements they create can be displayed in the classroom or woven onto a weaving frame. If following the religious education focus, children could create prayer cards as bookmarks to enable them to reflect back on the experience.

Step 3: Evaluate the activity outcomes

It is expected that the children will find the experience unique and challenging. For children who struggle to concentrate it may not lead to the expected outcomes, but they can be focused more if you get them to really listen to the music.

The activity was designed to introduce children to the spiritual dimension of learning in terms of the world being something very difficult for young children to conceptualise. It relates to emotional intelligence because the children are expected to have feelings beyond a simple good/happy or bad/sad. It is an effective way to introduce new words to their vocabulary.

As you complete the exercise in the classroom and reflect on the outcomes consider:

- How far have the children recognised the wonder of the universe and their place within it?
- Are you able to expose them to more complex language? (You could try using a thesaurus and link it to English skills.)

Step 4: Apply the evaluation of the activity to general practice

The evaluation of the activity needs to lead to strategies that can be generalised to all practice, not just activities that are set up for the purpose of improving emotional and mental wellbeing. Aspects of teaching that would emerge include:

- *Mindfulness*: children would be more alert to how they and their peers are feeling and accommodate the emotions of others.
- *Vocabulary*: children are better able to recognise complex language related to feelings and emotions.
- *Spirituality*: children are beginning to realise the complexity of their world and their place within it.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter we have explored the concept of emotional intelligence. We have explained the theory of emotional intelligence and we have provided you with some practical strategies for developing emotional intelligence in the classroom.

Further Reading

Namka, L. (2014) *Teaching Emotional Intelligence to Children*. Tucson, AZ: Talk, Trust & Feel Therapeutics.