

Emotional Intelligence and Education

Why should educators care about Emotional Intelligence?

Many of us may recall having a teacher or professor who was less than competent in the emotional domain— someone who gave overly harsh feedback and criticism, or ignored the needs of students. It is also easy to realize that emotional skills are critical to our own education.

We need to manage our own emotions in order to learn efficiently.

Optimizing Emotional Intelligence may thus contribute to the overall quality of education, both in the teaching and learning process.

Emotional Intelligence in Educators

If anyone doubts that emotional skills are necessary to being a good teacher, they most likely have not had much experience in a classroom. Perhaps this is why educators around the world have shown a great deal of enthusiasm about Emotional Intelligence. The abilities that comprise Emotional Intelligence— recognizing other's emotions, understanding emotions, using emotions to think clearly and creatively, and regulating emotions in oneself and in others— are the very interpersonal skills that are the hallmark of great teaching. By optimizing their own Emotional Intelligence, educators can be more effective inside and outside of the classroom.

As an example of how Emotional Intelligence can contribute to excellence in teaching, consider the ability to recognize individual differences in the emotional expressions of one's students. A teacher that possesses this ability will be able to tailor feedback and criticism to match the needs of the student. Students that are more confident and resilient, for instance, may be better suited to receive critical feedback with little need for buffering. This type of feedback may challenge them and stimulate intellectual development. Students prone to negative feelings and who lack confidence in the scholastic domain, on the other hand, may need their feedback tempered with praise. As is evident, educators that are able to make this distinction and read the emotions of their students will have greater success in meeting the diverse needs presented in the classroom.

Emotional Intelligence in Students

Emotional skills play an important role in achieving academic success.

One of the most important skills students can possess is the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and in others effectively. For instance, being able to handle the inevitable emotional problems that arise in middle school, high school, and even college, is a key factor in determining whether or not students will have the time, energy, and motivation to prepare adequately for school. If students don't make it to class because of personal problems, or if students are distracted because they are thinking about personal problems, they cannot learn.

Being able to regulate one's anger at receiving a bad grade, and using the emotion to motivate future activities (as opposed to giving up in despair) is another clear advantage to possessing emotional skills.

The contribution of Emotional Intelligence to academic success is one reason that emotional literacy programs are gaining popularity in schools around the world.

Emotional Skills May Prevent Violence and Delinquency in Students

Recent violent incidents reported in the news media have made the mental health of our youth very salient. Many experts believe that by improving the emotional competency of students, we may be able to avoid many of the problems that have plagued the modern classroom.

Schools have implemented emotional learning programs in an attempt to prevent violence, drug abuse, and risky sexual behavior (according to one count, over 300 such programs are in place in the U.S. alone).

Although they often go by different names, they have as their main goal the teaching of skills surrounding the effective management of emotions, the building of healthy social relationships, and the achievement of positive social and personal goals. There is promise that at least some of these programs have had a positive impact. For instance, one of the first of such programs, the Social Development Curriculum (instituted in the public schools of New Haven, Connecticut), has contributed to the reduction of school violence and feelings of hopelessness among students. A conflict-resolution program started in New York City called Resolving Conflict Creatively has also contributed to an overall reduction in aggressive behavior.