

Developing the Emotional Intelligence of Teams

An Action Research and Development Project

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A personal perspective

My deep interest in emotional intelligence began many years ago as a result of living through thirty years of ‘the troubles’ in Northern Ireland.

This experience tested our emotional intelligence in ways for which we were not prepared; to respect the views and perceptions of others (even though we may not agree with them); to acquire the skills of genuine listening; to find the humility, courage and ability to question the validity of long-held beliefs, values and attitudes, assumptions and prejudices; to dig deep to find the ability to forgive, to learn how to manage our anger; to develop skills necessary to engage in a respectful manner in debate and discussion...and many more. And all the time we were struggling to stay positive and hang on to hope.

This experience persuaded me to try to ensure that the next generation of children growing up in Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to attend schools which are guided by the following characteristics:

- values which have been discussed and agreed by staff, parents and pupils
- democratic management structures (e.g. distributive leadership)
- emotionally intelligent principals and emotionally intelligent staff who demonstrate emotionally intelligent behaviour
- a curriculum which places at the centre the development of emotional competencies of all children
- the extension of support to parents so that they too understand the importance of their role in developing the emotional intelligence of their children.

If this is to happen in all schools we must try to ensure that school leaders recognise the importance of emotional intelligence as a central life-skill, have the opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of their emotional intelligence and are given the opportunity to develop, when necessary, specific emotional intelligent competencies so that they feel confident, passionate and committed to the development of emotionally intelligent schools. We need, therefore, when designing and implementing Leadership and Management Development programmes to ensure that there is a balance between the focus on identifying task processes and the development of emotional intelligent competencies which bring about deep shifts in how we think, feel, behave and interact with others. The Action Research and Development project was guided by this thinking.

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The programme had the following four broad aims.

- a) to develop the emotional intelligence of leadership and management teams
- b) to design and develop activities, workshops and discussion papers to help team members develop their emotional intelligence
- c) to incorporate a range of models of learning: self-evaluation, reflection, dialogue, skilled discussion and collaborative coaching
- d) to evaluate the effectiveness of resources and strategies used throughout the project and to make recommendations for a range of Regional Training Unit course provision

Details of the process and findings of the research and development project are available in the following:

- main report
- a range of workshops, with facilitators notes, designed to support the development of the emotional intelligent competencies of leadership teams

Comments from Principals who participated in the dissemination conferences:

'I am determined to ensure that the children in my school are given the opportunity to develop their emotional intelligence so that they are better prepared than I was to deal with the many challenges life throws up. Our team, first of all, will help all staff to develop their emotional intelligence. We will then, over a three-year period, introduce a taught programme of work to ensure that all our children are given the opportunity to develop emotional intelligent competencies. We feel excited and committed'

'I think that the emotional aspect of education has been neglected within our system of education, with an over-emphasis on the development of cognitive skills. I think this has been responsible for a lot of ills in society'

'I think that part of the reason for behavioural problems in our schools is due to the fact that we have neglected the whole area of emotional intelligence. We need to teach children how to express and manage their emotions. This doesn't just happen for all children. We, as leaders and teachers, also need to learn how to demonstrate emotionally intelligent behaviour'

'I am horrified by the large number of young people in Northern Ireland who commit suicide. I think that if we paid more attention in our schools to helping children to acquire the language to express their emotions and to learn how to manage their emotions they might not feel so lonely, isolated, and desperate. Surely this at least worth trying.'

'I feel I have benefited personally and professionally as a result of this programme. I now have a heightened awareness of the impact of emotion on my thinking and behaviour, and I recognise that there are many areas I need to work on'

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(The very positive impact of the conferences on the individual's personal and professional life was commented upon in all evaluations)

Sheelagh McGrogan - Director of the Action Research and Development Project

Background:

- Teacher
- Part-time lecturer at Queens University, Belfast
- Deputy-Director at the Centre for Education Management
- At present Associate member of the RTU Leadership College
- Twenty years experience of designing and implementing Leadership Management Development programmes with school leadership teams from all sectors of education in Northern Ireland

Interests

Reading: favourite author of the moment, American writer Richard Ford – brilliant!

Art: no ability to paint but very interested in art - favourite painters Rembrandt and Bruegel

Poetry: Favourite poets are John Montague and Louis MacNiece, Raymond Carver, Derek Walcott, but this depends on the mood of the moment

Walking: Most enjoyable experience was walking in the Atlas Mountains. I was privileged to have been brought-up in a very wild, remote, lonely but beautiful part of Northern Ireland. This experience gave me a life-enhancing, life-long relationship with nature.