

Foreword

As we approach the next decade many challenges will face school leaders. One such challenge is the urgent need for staff at all organisational levels to better understand the importance and benefits of the development of emotional intelligence (EI) competencies for staff, pupils and parents.

This may not be an easy task. There still may be some individuals within schools who believe that the most important task of education is to develop cognitive abilities without paying any genuine regard to the development of emotional competencies. This thinking appears to be based on a belief that reason is a process which is entirely independent from emotion. Recognising the interdependence of the cognitive and emotional brain is seen as unnecessary. Research conducted by some of the world's leading experts on the neuro-psychology of emotion has made this view unacceptable.

“Emotion is integral to the process of reasoning and obsession – making for worse and for better” (Antonio Damsio: The Feeling of What Happens).

CEA has recognised the importance of this aspect of personal development for staff and pupils and in the revised N.I. curriculum has stressed the need for pupils, at all Key Stage levels, to develop emotional intelligence competencies.

“Through personal development children can develop insights into their own emotions, attitudes and moral values. The activities at all key stages aim to enhance the emotional competencies of children, their understanding of themselves and their relationship with others”.

CEA's strategy is largely focused on the production of activities/resources to support the development of emotional intelligence competencies of pupils. There is, however, a recognition that, if this aspect of personal development is to be implemented effectively, that school leaders too will need training and support.

It is timely, therefore, to disseminate the findings of this RTU research and development project. The project set out to develop the emotional intelligence competencies of school principals and their teams – essential prerequisites if all staff are to model emotional intelligence competencies, and feel motivated and confident in developing emotionally intelligent schools. Findings from the project show that it is possible to improve the emotional intelligence of individual team members and, consequently, the effectiveness of teams. However, it is also clear that this process involves exploring long-held beliefs, attitudes, thinking processes and the practice of new behaviour, over a period of time, in a variety of situations. One school leader summed up the difficulty of changing behaviour when she stated:

“I tend when I think I have been successful (e.g. I have spent time monitoring, reflecting and practising more effective listening skills) to fall back very quickly into old habits. I think that changing habits of a lifetime is difficult and a very slow process. You need to stick with it”.

It is reassuring to find that one year on since the completion of the research and development project, the principals involved have ‘stuck with it’ and are now reporting lots of anecdotal evidence relating to the very positive impact of this work on staff, both at a personal and professional level, and on the improvement in pupils’ self-esteem, learning and behaviour. Inspectors too have commented favourably on programmes of work now being developed by schools to ensure the development of emotional intelligence of staff and pupils.

I trust that this Executive Summary will encourage you to access (on RTU’s website www.rtuni.org) both the full report and, more importantly the learning resources/workshops underpinning the project schools’ EI journey so that you too can explore how EI can enhance both your personal effectiveness and the effectiveness of those leading, teaching and learning in your school.

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