



Why Emotional Literacy is good for your school

In this chapter I consider:

- • What is Emotional Literacy?
- • Why is it important?
- • What benefits can it bring to a school or setting?



An Introduction to Emotional Literacy

Have you considered the ethos you are aiming for? If the answer is that you want to achieve an enthusiastic and supportive learning community where there is a sense of belonging, where each pupil is valued for their unique contribution, where children have built the confidence, independence and resilience to enjoy challenge, explore creativity and fully engage in rich and deep learning experiences, where children respect each other and have a sense of pride in their achievements, then you could start with considering **Emotional Literacy**.



To Think About:

- *What sort of classroom ethos are you trying to achieve?*
- *What sort of class you want to have?*

What is Emotional Literacy?

Emotional Literacy is a way of 'being' not just of 'doing'. It is a pedagogical approach concerning teaching style and learning environment which you can develop with your pupils as a community approach to inclusion. Salovey & Mayer (1990) origi-

nally defined it as a type of 'social intelligence' which enables people to differentiate between emotions and the resulting actions. The teacher's role is then to provide a safe but rich and challenging learning environment where children are free to grow socially and emotionally, while academically nurtured. Mia Kellmer Pringle (1986) used Maslow's well known hierarchy of needs pyramid to develop a simplified theory for the needs of children. Basically only when a child feels emotionally safe and secure in their environment will they undertake the challenge and risk needed to learn. New learning challenges our self confidence, we need resilience to overcome disappointment or acknowledge our mistakes. Many children are simply not ready to do that and need our support to explore challenge safe from ridicule. Successful deep learning can only take place where recognition and praise is given not only for what is correct but for effort and for solutions found through collaboration. This type of supporting yet challenging environment, where collaboration is encouraged with 'scaffolding' to support and extend learning, follows the principles of social constructivism allowing children to blossom into independent learners through developing self esteem, self control and social skills.

The Context

This book is based in particular on the Emotional Literacy project which I undertook as a nursery class teacher, working at that time towards a post graduate degree in education. The project followed and documented an extended action research initiative initially with 76 nursery children aged between 3 and 5 years, then subsequently followed 19 of those children aged between 4½ and 5½ years through the transition into their first school year, with myself as their class teacher. Those 19 children were then joined by 6 other children who had all attended a neighbouring nursery. The 6 additional children had not had an explicit focus on Emotional Literacy which allowed for a contrast of data.

In the very beginning during the school annual audit the staff expressed a concern that there seemed to be a steady decline in the general levels of respect and discipline around the school. It was felt that our attainment targets were affected through poor attitudes being displayed by a growing number of pupils towards the school community, and particularly by many of the older children. This lack of social skills was perceived by the staff as a particular concern despite the existing good use of circle time, positive discipline and reward strategies throughout the school. The feeling was highlighted further in a whole school pre project baseline survey in which data was collected from children, parents and in school adults regarding perceptions of in-class and out-of-class behaviours. The result was a whole school commitment to introduce and develop a programme of Emotional Literacy.

It was hoped through focusing on Emotional Literacy to establish an inclusive feeling of responsibility and belonging between pupils and the school community. Further that the issues raised in the audit would be addressed through this initiative while simultaneously not just maintaining but improving attainment. However to successfully achieve any pedagogical change a staff need to believe in the worth of an initiative and understand the principles behind it, (Fullen: 1991). This requires training, in our case an initial whole staff training session was followed by professional reading around the subject and then the trial of resources lead by a small

group of committed staff. Effectively the whole school began to participate in the action research process, which as Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) assert is '*a powerful tool for change and improvement.*'

Through introducing Emotional Literacy from the earliest stages the nursery class played a foundational part in the wider whole school plan. To make progress required not only staff collaboration within the nursery setting but also with the whole school working group, and dialogue with other professionals, the management team, and vitally with our parents. The focus within the nursery was supported at that time by the 3-5 curriculum, SCCC (1999) which was first and foremost based on promoting social skills. Writing as an experienced teacher it was my contention that these skills were the foundation of all education, a view which is readily supported in current educational literature and in the new curricula across the United Kingdom.

Where to start with Emotional Literacy

In the beginning of your project it will be prudent to ensure that all staff involved has a clear and shared perception of your goal. It would also be prudent to have a little background knowledge and a common understanding of what Emotional Literacy is. It is important then to consider how the concept has evolved and the many benefits the approach can bring.

Why Emotional Literacy?

Emotional Literacy (EL) is still a relatively new and growing area in education and is based on the theory of Emotional Intelligence (sometimes referred to as EI or EQ), the ability to process emotional information. This theory is usually considered to have been developed by Salovey & Mayer in 1990, the term 'Emotional Intelligence' making the simple link between the affective and the cognitive domains. Today their work is supported through contemporary research (Smith 2004; Blakemore 2005) which tells us that the brain plays a central role in emotional response. We know for example that the pre-frontal cortex is involved in social, cognitive and emotional processes such as the regulation of attention, pain, self control, flexibility and self awareness and seems very sensitive to the environment. We also know that our brain makes strong and crucial connections between our senses and our emotions. (Damasio 2003)

Emotional Intelligence is often referred to as Emotional Literacy in educational circles, the term 'Literacy' suggesting a practical process or concept which one can be taught 'to read'. I believe there is an innate element to emotion which through careful nurturing can be developed and refined, and then further skills taught developing into what may be known as Emotional Literacy.

The initial research of Salovey and Mayer has been reframed and internationally popularised during the last 10 years through the works of Daniel Goleman (1996; 1998). Goleman made the case that emotional and social intelligence is more relevant than conventional intelligence in the work place and for a successful life. Salovey and Mayer saw Emotional Intelligence as being made up of 4 distinct

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Emotional control • Self-motivation 	<p>the capacity to recognise your feelings as they happen</p> <p>the resilience to self manage your emotional reactions</p> <p>perseverance and determination to work with your emotions to overcome challenge</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Handling relationships 	<p>emotional sensitivity to other people's feelings</p> <p>self confidence and social skills to work collaboratively or to lead people.</p>

Figure 1.1 Bringing the key areas of emotional intelligence together

branches, put very simply these are perception, thought, understanding & management. These could be seen as foundational to the 5 domains for Emotional Literacy laid out by Goleman (1996). The DCSF Seal strategy (2005) is based on a similar five core aspects: self-awareness, managing feelings, empathy, motivation, and social skills which are considered basic to the development of Emotional Literacy.

The work of Howard Gardner (1983) on multiple intelligences could be considered to take a parallel view and has had a significant impact on teaching and learning. His theory, stresses the breadth of intelligences including interpersonal and intra-personal intelligence which both relate to Emotional Literacy. Interpersonal intelligence, relates to taking account of other people and their emotional states and intra-personal intelligence, recognising and managing our own emotions successfully. The idea of Emotional Literacy is therefore nothing new but it demonstrates a growing awareness of the multi faceted nature of intelligence, and the importance of understanding the relevance of this as an approach to learning and teaching.

To Think About:

- *Who should provide this nurturing?*
- *Is this within the remit of teachers?*

Governing bodies recognise the potential implications of disruptive or indeed compliant behaviour masking underlying emotional problems which teachers often feel ill qualified to handle. There is also support in Christie et al. (1999) for the assertion that many children demonstrate a lack of empathy which challenges teacher professionalism. However successful teachers can and do encourage the development of intra personal awareness and self esteem. If there is even some small cognitive element to emotion then, as Sharp (2001) acknowledges, the skills of control and understanding should be nurtured, taught and practised in the form of Emotional Literacy. To be really effective these skills need to be modelled and taught not only by individual teachers but as a whole school community including both teaching and non teaching staff. Weare (2007) believes there is unequivocal evidence to support a whole school approach to Emotional Literacy.

An essential consideration in forming your own definition is then the different individual interpretations each of the staff has developed in relation to past experience. For this project it was important that this awareness of individual and per-

sonal difference in understanding was acknowledged and as far as we were able, a common understanding of Emotional Literacy developed, allowing construct validity or a shared, clear and common focus with which to gauge observations in the same light. To this end the staff immediately involved in the project each wrote their personal understanding of Emotional Literacy. After reflection together with discussion on our personal understandings and reading, the following definition was agreed as our common understanding at that time and shared with our nursery parents. It includes our recognition of differences both amongst ourselves and our pupils and appreciates the need to accept children as they are, because of their different life experience. I believe this individual level of acceptance is fundamental to Emotional Literacy.

Emotional Literacy is a developed awareness and understanding of one's own and others emotions. This information guides our thinking and is expressed in our communication and behaviour. Further, it is the understanding that individuals feel emotions in different ways and therefore have different responses depending on their life experience. (Parkhead Nursery Staff, 2004)

The potential of Emotional Literacy

Our collaborative definition of Emotional Literacy which highlights the need for individual understanding of our selves and each other is significant when we consider the concerns of Christie et al (1999) that the young people of Europe are disaffected, demonstrating a decline in social and moral values. Their evidence suggests that greater effort should be made to encourage preventative strategies aimed at promoting children's social skills and interpersonal awareness.

Christie et al undertook an intervention study in Scottish primary schools using a sample of 321 nine year old children. The findings of this study clearly highlight the potential of programmes which encourage Emotional Literacy. Perhaps never before in history has this concept of interpersonal awareness been more important. Set in a contemporary society where materialism at times seems to outreach traditional values and where social respect appears to be in decline Emotional Literacy encompasses so much which simply makes social common sense. Coming from the interdisciplinary foundations of brain research, neurology, psychoneuroimmunology, educational research, psychotherapeutic and psychiatric research and social and cognitive therapy - it has a prestigious heritage. In bringing together the work of Goleman (1996) with Gardner (1983) it highlights their common belief in the importance of recognizing breadth of intelligences, in particular intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence, the ability to reason with and understand one's self and others. And now it is at the heart of our curriculum reforms, as stated in the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL: 2005)

The Action Research Context

This project was based on the belief that education is child centred in nature, on the premise that skills in Emotional Literacy are fundamental to becoming a full, active and valued member of society and that Emotional Literacy comes from within and

is expressed through our communication and behaviours. Furthermore, that these skills, initially developed in the home environment, are more developed in some children than others depending on their socio-cultural circumstances, and can be nurtured within the school community to encourage communication, allow expression of feeling, develop understanding of others and build self control. My assertion is that development of Emotional Literacy skills through the growth of self awareness and self esteem will empower children to maximise their learning and thereby in time raise attainment. This is supported in the work of Morris (2002), Hargreaves (2000) and Goleman (1996; 1998).

After reflecting on current Emotional Literacy literature along with considerable observation and reflection upon the social interactions within the nursery I chose to undertake an action research approach to answer the research question.

If Emotional Literacy becomes an explicit focus during the preschool stage as part of daily small-group time and throughout the nursery activities, will this develop the children's ability to express their feelings, and to manage their own social behaviour.

Forming a Baseline

A firm and collaborative foundation was first established on which to build this project through:

- Pupil observation, followed by staff team discussion, reflection, evaluation, planning & organisation, in line with the action research process (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993)
- Building strong relationships with the parents through daily exchanges of information and regular coffee meetings, (Fullen 1991)
- The introduction of daily group times with a focus on active listening and participation to build confidence, listening and talking skills, (Bayley & Broadbent, 2001).

Also data was gathered to form a triangulated baseline demonstrating an initial level of Emotional Literacy through

- Semi-structured interview, gathering quantitative data on pupil use of emotional vocabulary and supported by a parental questionnaire.
- Semi-structured interview, gathering quantitative data on pupil recognition and labelling of facial expression.
- Observation, gathering qualitative data on pupil social interaction.

These data gathering methods were discussed fully in the dissertation, together they formed both investigator and methodological triangulation for a baseline which demonstrated the quality of emotional vocabulary being used by the children.

January 05: Emotional vocabulary used by Parkhead Nursery Pre-schoolers
-later entering 1a.

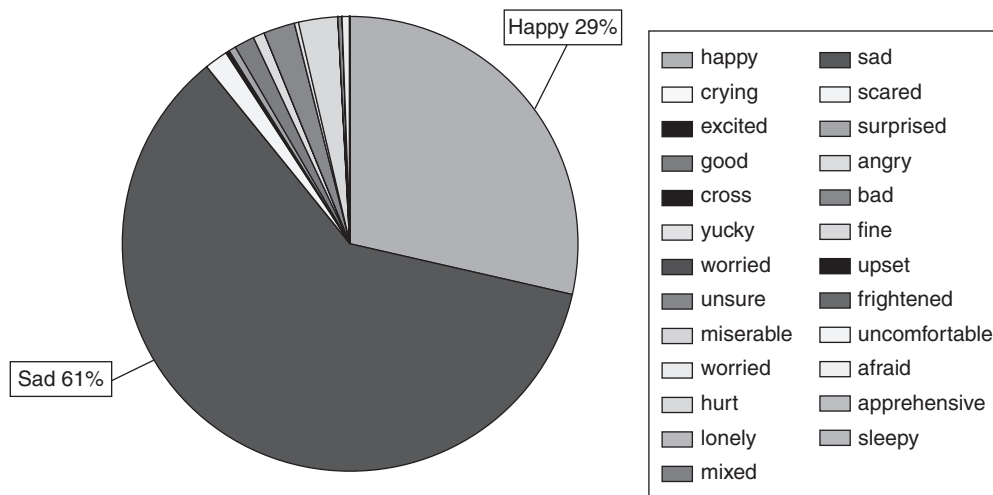


Figure 1.3 Results of the emotional vocabulary pupil interview

The pupil emotional vocabulary interviews were carried out with consideration to justification & limitations using a semi-structured interview schedule as shown in resource 1.5. This incorporated the use of a puppet who, having lost his voice needed the children's help. The objective was to ascertain if the children could verbalise an emotional understanding of how another would feel in a given scenario. The puppet was used to retain focus through making the activity both more fun and understandable for the younger age group. A questionnaire was also given out to all parents with the objective of supporting the data collected from the pupil interview through asking parents about the range of vocabulary that children use to express their emotional understanding of social situations. This questionnaire was based on the same interview scenarios as the children and to encourage questionnaire returns a discrete returns box was set up and a note of thanks combined with a reminder was distributed to maximise returns.

Cohen et al (2000:113) assert that *'the weakness of any one method can be strengthened by using a combined approach to the problem.'* Through employing *'investigator triangulation'* to observation, a collaborative problem solving approach was achieved. The action research approach best met our aim to reflect upon and monitor changes to practice, as a result of introducing Emotional Literacy within the nursery. It is an approach based on collaborative problem solving, which specifically suits nursery staffing and which Campbell et al (2004:22) claim encourages thriving *'professional communities'* and *'networks'*.

To ensure purposeful reflection I used the process of discussion with *'critical friends'* as described in Campbell et al (2004). This support helped to retain a certain perspective when as a teacher researcher one can become deeply involved in the learning and teaching process. I believe that the learning gained through the action research

process is particularly strong and at the top quality end of Rodgers & Freiberg (1995) continuum of experiential learning. Elliot & Sarland (1995:384) conclude that action research '*is now established as an important and influential movement*' bringing about what Elliot (1991:52) describes as '*practical wisdom*'.

A reflective journal based on personal observations of practice, and which also relates reflections to professional reading and development opportunities, facilitates the action research process through conscientious and meaningful reflection. This choice of research vehicle is central to the action research process, and can generate a deep and rich data source. Although this type of data can create some difficulties in drawing together a clear and concise analysis, the advantage of the flexible, child centred, informal approach allows for personal feeling and opinion. The data generated is invaluable so long as it is recognised for what it is, opinion which is based on experience. Somekh (1995) supports asserting that documentation of reflections affords validity to the research.

Further reading

The New Meaning of Educational Change by Michael Fullan (2007), originally published in 1999, is now in its 4th edition and has useful advice concerning the impact and sustainability of change as does 'Break Through' published by the same author in 2006.

Developing the Emotionally Literate School written by Katherine Weare (2004) gives an excellent overview. I only regret it was not available when I was carrying out my project.

I also recently read *Why Love Matters: How affection shapes a baby's brain* by Sue Gerhardt (2004). This is a very interesting back ground read underlining the significance of early relationships on later social behaviours.

Electronic Resources

Go to www.sagepub.co.uk/chrstinebruce for electronic resources for this chapter:

- 1.1 Project Aims and Objectives
- 1.2 Project Action Plan
- 1.3 Project Time Table
- 1.4 Revised Time Table
- 1.5 Nursery pupil interview
- 1.6 Primary pupil interview
- 1.7 Nursery parent interview
- 1.8 Primary parent interview
- 1.9 Emotional Expression Drawings

Resource 1.1 Project aims and objectives

To answer the research question the aims were: to work towards a more Emotionally Literate school; to embed Emotional Literacy into the nursery curriculum; to monitor progress and to reflect on practice thereby building a learning community which was more caring and beneficial.

The objectives were:

- To monitor, reflect upon and evaluate the children's confidence and skills to communicate in social contexts, including:
 - The extent to which pupils' use of vocabulary to express understanding of emotions impacts on their social behaviour.
 - Pupil ability to 'read' non-verbal communication in terms of body language, gesture, facial expression and eye contact.
 - The range of vocabulary pupils use to express their emotional understanding of social situations.
 - The levels of confidence pupils demonstrate to express their own feelings and opinions.
- To reflect upon and develop my own understanding and practice, including:
 - Reflection on and development of the practical application of Emotional Literacy in the classroom context, through the action research process of reflection on action.
 - Evaluation and refinement of my initial conception of the value in developing Emotional Literacy, so that I will be in a position to share my learning with my colleagues.
- To share my findings with my colleagues, including:
 - The process of undertaking, evaluating and sharing my research with the staff in order to take the school a step closer to becoming an Emotionally Literate workplace.

These objectives were based on establishing a working definition for Emotional Literacy through a review of current literature and exploring the relevance of this to education.

Resource 1.2 Project Action Plan

An initial action plan was designed to meet the research question aims and objectives taking account of the nursery action research approach alongside the whole school project. Consideration has been given to the allocation of an appropriate timescale to ensure stability and reliability over time, available resources, research method and the research instruments employed.

- Months 1–3
- Background reading
 - Project discussion with management
 - Sharing ideas with nursery team
 - Nursery staff discussion clarifying our conceptions of EL
 - Observation and discussion of pupil social interaction
 - Reflection and evaluation
 - Planning and organisation: Forming an action plan.
- Months 3–5
- Ground work in small-group skills, listening and participation
 - Triangulated observation and discussion of pupil social interaction
 - Regional working party: improving observation for assessment
 - Reflection and evaluation
 - Updating/modifying the action plan.
- Months 6–7
- Establishing a baseline of pupil EL vocabulary
 - Discussion of participating and control groups
 - Informing parents.
- Months 7–9
- Intervention activities – major nursery focus.
 - Continuous self evaluation and reflection
 - Continuous evaluation and planning by team
 - Discuss and reflect on progress, necessary changes to practice, as part of team meetings.
- Months 9–16
- Modifications to action plan
 - Intervention activities – focus on transition.
 - Continuous self evaluation & reflection
 - Staff discussion and evaluation
 - Action research cycle – extension into primary 1
- Month 13
- Interim assessment and project evaluation.
 - Inclusion of non participant nursery pupils and new class mix.
- Months 15–17
- Intervention activities
 - Continuous self evaluation and reflection
 - Staff presentation and discussions
 - Modifications to action plan
- Month 18
- Final assessments
- Months 19–21
- Analysis and interpretation of data collected.
- Activity Resources:
- Developing Baseline Communication Skills and Delamain & Spring (2000)
 - Helping Young Children to Listen (Bayley & Broadbent, 2001)
 - Nursery library of stories and fairy tales
 - Parachute, top start and school gym equipment
 - Various puppets
 - IT equipment: digital camera, video recorder, audio recorder, programmable toy,
 - BBC educational website access in p1
 - The children themselves and their nursery environment.
- Teaching Methods:
- Small group and whole class ‘together time’ situations
 - Circle time games, stories, display and role play
 - Integration of EL throughout daily nursery games and activities
 - Use in social intervention/positive behaviour strategies
 - Staff modelling and scaffolding.



Emotional Literacy as an approach to Learning and Teaching

In this chapter, I consider:

- **How small changes in your practice can have a big impact**
- **Creating and using spaces for Emotional Literacy**
- **Planning for Emotional Literacy**



Previously, I gave a flavour of the context for the project, the initial research planning and baseline findings. These were based on considerable observation and reflection upon the social interactions within the nursery and gave rise to the action research question ...

If Emotional Literacy becomes an explicit focus during the preschool stage as part of daily small-group time and throughout the nursery activities, will this develop the children's ability to express their feelings, and to manage their own social behaviour.

I also put forward the notion that Emotional Literacy is a way of being not just of doing. It is a pedagogical approach concerning teaching style and learning environment now consider how this might affect your practice as your read on.

The development of Emotional Literacy in this project was based on a series of common threads in my reading but was strongly influenced by the person centred ideals of Rogers (1969) and inspired by the practical success of Sharp (2001) and Faupel (2003). These ideas stress the importance of establishing a sense of belonging, through using small groups to teach specific skills within a supportive framework. This unified and empathetic approach depends on a common teaching and learning philosophy, which puts Emotional Literacy centrally in the curriculum, developing self esteem and greater pupil autonomy. Underlying this is the work of Hanko (2002) and Roberts (1995). Undertaking action research allowed this approach to develop and grow in depth as I continued to read and reflect on a variety of experi-



Photo 2.1 A tent for a quiet den

ences. In this chapter I hope to share some of the ideas which as they come together underpin the EL approach.

Developing and Using Space

A quiet space

Within the structure of your newly created learning environment also allow a space for solitary chill or cool down. This could be a floor area with a rug and cushion, a den made with an old sheet or a specific table with 2 chairs. This designated space should be kept specifically for the purpose of quiet reflection with an alternative general use quiet area elsewhere for reading and/or writing activities. Give careful thought to how you will resource this space, for example a very young child may feel exhausted after a tantrum where as an older child may benefit from a copy of your class contract, (see resource bank) with paper and pencil to hand, a 1-10 emotion chart or an emotion management book.... I find a reflective writing journal ideal support for older children.

Space for Emotional Literacy

Small areas for curricular resource and display for example science, free writing, reading, listening, small world play, topic work are applicable within the learning area for any age group to stimulate thinking, discussion and challenge. So why not a specific area for emotional literacy resourced with a mirror, emotion management



Photo 2.2 A place to sit and think

books, pencils, a class journal, worry box, post-its. This would be a 'thinking space' for reflection on events. A Wall of fame to celebrate success and express feelings of pride might support this area as well as a special person chart which gives each child the opportunity to be a special person for the day. I display their photo with some thoughts why they are special added from the children. The class can decide at the beginning of term what the special day right or rights might be e.g. line leader, responsibility for the class puppet, use of a particular cushion, the right to sit anywhere or in a special chair etc.

Your space

The teacher's desk, so often piled up with classroom rubble should not be excluded in this EL environment. This is an opportunity to set an example to the children. The surface should be tidy and calming with a photo of the class family along with one of your family and perhaps flowers or a plant. A colourful basket or box could be used to store miscellaneous teaching aids such as a task timer, positive smiley face or star shaped post-its to hand out, your daily plan with space to jot down reflections & observations as you work. Encourage any class visitor or support staff to add their observations too.

'Our' space

Welcome and start the day with clear organisational routines. When you open the door in the morning welcome not just the children, but their parents and families too. Part of that routine are the class greetings which help to establish a sense of belonging and community. This is an opportunity to express a personal emotional state using number or colour.

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