EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR TEACHERS

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The paper offers reflective insight into emotional intelligence and how it can be nurtured and strengthened throughout teaching.

It is generally accepted that emotions influence everything we say and do. Strong, uncontrollable emotions can stop us from making impartial decisions, sap our vitality, erode our confidence, alter our perception of reality, our capacity to act thoughtfully and appropriately. While we cannot choose what happens to us and shut off our emotions effectively and entirely, we can learn to regulate them and stay healthy. To become more mature emotionally in the face of emotional imbalance and manage difficult situations calmly and effectively, we must develop emotional competence or intelligence like a muscle that can be exercised and built over time.

When it comes to high quality teaching, emotional health matters just as much as professionalism. Teaching can be very draining: the constant having to be "on", caring about doing job well, creating engaging lesson plans that fit the curriculum, caring too much for students, trying to “control" the class, dealing with instructional activities, disciplining students, endless time-consuming paperwork, extended working hours, pressure from school administrators, making micro decisions, the high expectations on teacher, worrying how to fit in administration demand, worries over grades, the other high workloads of regular classes make teachers more likely to experience stress, anxiety and symptoms of depression that can negatively affect teaching by disrupting job satisfaction and efficiency. If you are academically brilliant and yet are emotionally inept and unable to modulate the emotional response, this can leave you feeling distressed, vulnerable to anxiety and depression and further exacerbate any mental health problems [1]. In those moments when circumstances seem dim, emotional regulation becomes invaluable. It’s even more important for teachers to operate in emotionally intelligent ways to meet the demands of the profession than the traditional measure of intelligence – IQ.

There are lots of different ways to become more emotionally intelligent but the basic idea is that to be emotionally intelligent you need to be aware of your emotions and have knowledge of your strengths, weaknesses, limitations, motivations, biases and assumptions when conducting a lesson. There are a lot of research on how to cultivate or enhance a stronger sense of self-awareness. Bill George, professor of management practice at the Harvard Business School suggests developing a daily self-reflection practice. His book “Finding your true north” offers methods for personal reflection: meditation, journaling, yoga, prayer, mindfulness exercises, even a thoughtful walk or jog, breathing, guided imagery, solicit feedback from peers which
can provide you with the opportunity to know yourself better, which, in turn, can result in improved workplace effectiveness, less stress, and stronger relationships [2]. Dr. Kristin Neff, an associate professor in the University of Texas at Austin's department of educational psychology, and Dr. Christopher Germer, a clinical psychologist and lecturer on psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, co-authored the science-based workbook "The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook: A Proven Way to Accept Yourself, Build Inner Strength, and Thrive", which offers a step-by-step approach to breaking free of harsh self-judgments and impossible standards in order to cultivate emotional well-being [3].

The present paper suggests developing emotional awareness by asking the how, what and why questions about what and how you feel, do, think, say or respond while instructing in a class. Asking questions or self-questioning might sound like a simple thing, but it is a starting point to become more self-aware of how you react emotionally to what is going around you. Whenever classroom stressful situations arise and you are feeling down, try questioning yourself thoughtfully. Take a second and make a conscious effort to formulate proper questions, investigate what you’re feeling, label the emotion and consider why you’re feeling this way and what might have triggered such a strong emotional response. Self-questioning means intellectually disciplined process of an active, persistent and careful consideration. Simply put, self-questioning triggers reasoning, which is infinitely more powerful than emotion and influences what feelings we experience. It leads us to meaningful and thoughtful process of decision-making about how you choose to behave toward yourself and others. By asking yourself you’ll be able to control impulsive feelings, regulate emotions and behaviors rather than letting your emotions control you. Practicing self-questioning will allow teachers to be better equipped to handle challenges they face in the classroom, defuse conflict and make improved, unbiased decisions that contribute to wellbeing and resiliency.

Conclusion. Negative emotions (e.g., boredom, anger, anxiety, frustration, sadness, and fear) that are not under conscious control can negatively affect teaching by draining mental energy and disrupting critical thinking. While we cannot stop our emotions from being triggered, we can learn to modulate them if cultivate a strong sense of self-awareness. One of the ways to nurture self-awareness is formulating proper questions that encourage us to think about present situation in a logical, sensible way. When classroom stressful situations arise, we recommend the use of self-questioning, one of the most important psychological traits you can develop within yourself. With the habit to have an internal thoughtful monologue amidst imbalanced situation you will be an emotionally intelligent teacher who properly regulates emotions in response to a stressful stimulus and doesn’t let them disrupt your teaching. The benefits of self-asking extend to everything—whether it’s managing your emotions in conflict or understanding your weaknesses at work or being realistic on what you can accomplish. Mindful self-questioning can improve teachers' awareness and control of their thinking, which in turn can promote their well-being.

References: