Emotional Intelligence as a Primary Goal of Education

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Introduction

The central purpose of education is continually under scrutiny. Given our increasingly interconnected world, some scholars argue that education should aim to cultivate global citizens (Nussbaum, 2002; Schattle, 2008). Philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues for liberal arts education at the collegiate level, encouraging epistemologies that allow students to understand a variety of global perspectives. This paper extends Nussbaum's argument, positing that education for critical self-reflection and the development of empathic practices should be the persistent purpose of education from the moment a student enters school, not just something introduced in college. Educators and the institutions in which they work bear the responsibility of equipping students with knowledge of their own emotions, the emotions of others, and how to relate to and communicate with others effectively. By doing so, educators lay the groundwork for producing globally aware, emotionally intelligent citizens.

A Basis for Educating for Emotional Intelligence: What is Knowledge?

To present a sound argument for emotional intelligence as a central aim of education, it is first necessary to examine its place within the wider realm of knowledge. Previous scholars have defined knowledge as belief that is eternally true, with wisdom being the most refined form of knowledge in that the belief is justifiable (Macallister, 2012, p. 260). The problem with this definition is that only propositional knowledge seems to fit. Propositional knowledge can be explained by knowing "what" or knowing "that." For example, a student can claim he knows that James Madison was the fourth President of the United States. According to Macallister's classification this student possesses knowledge, given that this belief is eternally true as proven by historic documents.

It is fairly simple to identify when one has propositional knowledge. But when it comes to practical knowledge, knowing "how", eternally true beliefs become hard to quantify. When does

knowing how to ride a bike become an eternally true belief? An agent can believe she knows how to ride a bike, however confirmation of this knowledge can only come subjectively. Therefore it is nearly impossible to not only validate that these beliefs are true, but to deem them eternal. Emotional intelligence arguably falls within the realm of practical knowledge. Those who acquire it are learning a plethora of skills related to emotional, including how to identify emotions in yourself and others, how to process and react to said emotions, and how to navigate interpersonal relationships, among other skills. To promote education for emotional intelligence, then, it is necessary to reconsider Macallister's definition of knowledge, which has its roots in Aristotelian logic. My proposed definition sees knowledge not as beliefs that are eternally true, but rather mastery over certain reliable subject material.

Psychologists have found that students learn best when they are repeatedly tested on the content of interest, allowing them to obtain knowledge by demonstrating mastery (Butler, 2010; Karpicke & Blunt, 2011; Nevid & Mahone, 2009; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). While this technique has been studied specifically in relation to memory, its implications can be extended to a broader understanding of knowledge. When a student has mastered subject material, it can be argued that they have gained knowledge. Mastery is reached when the student can fluidly explain said subject matter to someone with no prior knowledge to the point of complete understanding in the receiving agent.

This definition thus extends to both propositional and practical knowledge. A student with the knowledge that James Madison was the fourth President of the United States can explain this to a peer along with any additional information to back this up, and a different student can explain the process of riding a bicycle. Educators then bear the primary burden of instilling knowledge in students, as it is their job to explain material that they have mastery over to the point of understanding. Clearly, however, educators are not the only transmitters of knowledge, as parents, community members, and even fellow students are equally as capable of conveying their expertise (King & Adelgais, 1998).

There is one limitation with this definition of knowledge in that it runs the risk of relaying incorrect information. For example, a person can master the idea of James Monroe as the United States' fourth President and communicate this to a naive outsider. This is why it is essential that the mastered material is *reliable*. For our definition of knowledge, something becomes reliable when it can be consistently confirmed by trustworthy sources, an extension of social scientists' definition of reliability in research (McLeod, 2013). For propositional knowledge, this may include consulting academic literature. For practical knowledge, this may take the form of

consulting an expert in the skill of interest, such as a professional dancer or cyclist.

Why to Educate for Emotional Intelligence

Now with a renewed understanding of knowledge and how to know when a student has obtained it, I return to the argument of educating for the acquisition of emotional intelligence. It should be noted that emotional intelligence is usually a focus of education in young children, in line with their social development (Johnson et al., 2000). Through my work with preschool and kindergarten-aged children in multiple contexts, I have watched them grapple with these new curiosities about their emotions. Children often explore emotions through their play to gain a better understanding of their own selves and how they relate to others in a safe environment with adult scaffolding (Paley, 1990). Why then should this emotionally focused education become less consistent and explicit after kindergarten? Our emotional profiles change as we develop, and it becomes arguably more important to acknowledge these emotional changes as we grow up and expand our social circles. We are failing our students by not integrating emotional intelligence in their curriculum as they pass through each developmental phase.

One of the core reasons that knowledge of emotional intelligence must be at the forefront of education is that it is universal to any career path a student pursues. As our world becomes increasingly globalized, many fields actively encourage collaboration over a more traditional, hierarchical workplace (Kraus, 1980). With a curriculum that develops emotional intelligence over the course of their educational journeys, students will be well-equipped with critical communication skills by the time they enter the workforce. In addition to comfortably collaborating, students will also be able to recognize when they or their colleagues are experiencing difficulty, professionally or personally, and will understand how to navigate and reduce internal conflict to prevent large-scale disruption. Many mishaps in the workplace are a result of miscommunication, and emotional intelligence fosters social skills and awareness as to minimize this likelihood and ensure swift conflict resolution should mishaps occur.

Furthermore, beyond the workplace, mastery of emotional intelligence helps students succeed as global citizens both within their individual communities as well as in the wider world. For example, practicing emotional intelligence in the classroom would include perspective-taking, which has been shown to foster empathic practices (Hinnant & O'Brien, 2007). This helps students better understand their immediate communities as well as cultures outside of their own. In many of today's urban classrooms students come from an array of cultural, socioeconomic and familial backgrounds (Milner, 2010). Education that promotes reflection and perspective-taking is thus necessary, leading each

individual student to better understand both his/her immediate and wider communities and how he/she can intervene within them. Policymakers must do better in actively and explicitly including emotionally intelligent learning goals in mandated curricula, and educators must do better in pushing beyond the current constructs of this curricula until they do. Societal progress and a greater understanding of one another depends on it.

Arguments Against Education for Emotional Intelligence and its Practicality in the Classroom

There is, however, one argument against education for emotional intelligence that must be addressed. Prior work by Jason Baher discusses character education, a more personal form of education that instills morals of compassion, respect, and integrity (2013, p. 252). He notes how this education has been criticized for sacrificing rigor in favor of intimacy (Baher, 2013, p. 255). Although educating for character growth and educating for emotional intelligence are not exactly the same, the two are comparable as they both place emphasis on values of empathy and consideration. To make a stronger case for educating for emotional intelligence, I wish to push back against Baher's view that educating for these values cannot be rigorous.

It should be noted that there are practical ways to include lessons of emotional intelligence within each academic discipline, ensuring that no student is being deprived of content that challenges her. For example, in disciplines of reading, writing, and history, educators can formulate discussions and assignments around characters' motivations, thoughts, and sentiments when carrying out specific actions. Writing exercises can encourage students to imagine themselves "at the scene" of their assigned readings, developing their capacity to take on others' perspectives and reflect on their own emotional responses in varying contexts. In classes of science and mathematics, students can work in groups on projects, complex equations, and even assessments to target interpersonal communication competence.

Furthermore, academic programs that have placed larger emphasis on emotional intelligence have been shown to be widely successful. Evidence suggests that emotional intelligence-based education in medical school has the potential to produce highly professional, communicative doctors who are capable of delivering safe and compassionate care (Cherry et al., 2014). Additionally, the incorporation of emotional intelligence-based courses in primary school as part of an intervention study yielded higher scores on standardized achievement tests in the experimental group (Hawkins et al., 1991; see also Vandervoot, 2006). Emotionally intelligent-focused education shows promise to produce wiser and more capable students and deserves to be adopted on a grander scale.

Conclusion

There are many benefits to educating specifically for emotional intelligence throughout one's time in school. Emotional intelligence itself-self, social, and emotional awareness and interpersonal skills is a form of practical knowledge that students can and should continue to develop mastery over throughout their educational journeys. Policymakers and educators must work to help students better understand their roles as citizens in their immediate and wider communities. It is only then that educators can meet the needs of today's students and work to produce successful and empathetic global citizens.

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