

Self Observation and Inquiry in the Generation of Emotional Intelligence

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Given that perception is so sensitive to emotion and given that truth is so sensitive to perception, it behooves us to attend closely to the relationship between these factors particularly if we think education has something to do with truth. This paper focuses primarily upon one of these factors, namely emotion, and in particular what has come to be known as Emotional Intelligence (EQ). An argument is made in favor of broadening and deepening the popular definition of EQ, and in so doing, much is implied about the limits of perception and hence, 'truth'. The paper moves towards establishing a need for the recognition of conditioned emotion both as a phenomenon affecting our daily life as well as a phenomenon about which much scientific research on 'emotion' more generally, may actually be focused. To this end, the paper begins with a consideration of research in these areas and what one may necessarily conclude, and then extends itself to a more comprehensive understanding of what it could mean to be 'emotionally intelligent'.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Daniel Coleman (1995) in his landmark book, *Emotional Intelligence* coined the term «EQ». Physiological research was revealing the existence of neural pathways for unconscious emotional processing, and psychological and educational research was showing the consequences of coping with emotional difficulty or trauma and why some people may feel a choice in being able to do that and others don't. Working from Goleman's definition, the popular conception of EQ could probably be adequately described as the ability to know what one is feeling and the ability to communicate it appropriately together with the ability to get along with other people, being able to 'read' well others' feelings and responding appropriately.

Another equally significant conclusion from this research that Coleman alerts us to is the substantiation of neural networks for unconscious emotion. That is to say the research gives credence to long-held psychoanalytic beliefs of unconscious emotion formulated in childhood and carried as emotional memory triggered by similar stimuli in the present. More recent findings in clinical fields have corroborated this more 'hard-core' research.

Perhaps one of the most significant conclusions Goleman makes drawing from the work of Joseph LeDoux is the apparent lack of involvement of the left hemisphere of the brain (the thinking brain) in emotional outbursts, that is, when one is acting emotionally unintelligently. Apparently, before the work of Le Doux in 1995, it was understood that emotional processing took place first in the cortex then in the limbic system. ¹ LeDoux's research showed, however, that in some cases stimuli can be first taken to the limbic system before cortical layers have a chance to kick in. This so-called «emotional tripwire» is what has been more recently used to explain the «emotional outburst», the feeling of doing something and not knowing what came over oneself in the doing. More recently Le Doux (1996) explains that this can be accounted for in terms of humankind's evolution. Man simply has not evolved sufficiently to have more of his emotion imbued with thought. Le Doux writes,

Emotions can flood consciousness because at this point in history, connections from the emotional brain to the cognitive system are stronger than those from the cognitive system to the emotional system (LeDoux 1996, 19)

Arguments coming from the clinical field in psychology corroborate these findings and attest to the necessity of a more strident involvement of the left hemisphere of the brain for the resolution of some clinical disorders. Ross Greene, for example, from Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, works intensively with Oppositionally Defiant Children and asserts that part of what being a therapist or a helping parent entails is becoming the child's left hemisphere. For Greene, we have to «find out what the child is thinking that he shouldn't be, and what he's not thinking that he should be», and accordingly, start training his thinking. ² According to Greene, we have to become the child's «surrogate frontal lobe» whereby the child can be helped with skills like, staying calm in the midst of frustration, problem-definition, anticipation of problems, generating alternative solutions, taking another's perspective, 'seeing' the big picture, interpreting accurately, finding language to match individual and situational needs, altering cognitive biases, etc. (Greene 2001, 14)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

In an earlier paper I made an argument for the role of philosophical and creative thinking in the development of emotional intelligence. (Gazzard 2001) In this paper I wish to reiterate those points but also to make an argument for the further need of self-observation and inquiry. Briefly the argument proposed that, in light of the apparent absence of cortical feedback at times of emotional distress, early childhood is the place to begin engaging children cognitively with the emotion in question. That is to say, it is not enough to engage children (or even adults) cognitively at times of distress unless that engagement is specifically about the emotion in question. Walking around the block when one is angry may prevent actions one might later regret, but in and of itself it does little to deepen one's understanding of one's feeling or the situation in which it occurred. Rather creative or philosophic engagement with the problem at the time of its inception and duration holds more likelihood of such an outcome, particularly if this is encouraged in early childhood. ³ Alice Miller (2001) in her recent insightful book, «The Truth Will Set You Free» speaks also to the necessity of early childhood intervention as a means to forestall patterns of emotional ill health and encourage emotional health and intelligence. Drawing upon even more recent brain research of Joseph Le Doux and others, she writes,

The consensus is that early emotions leave indelible traces in the body and are encoded as information that will have a serious impact on the way we feel and think as adults, although those effects normally remain beyond the reach of the conscious mind and logical thought. « (Miller, 2001, 118)

However few attempts have been made to make use of this research data by way of a therapeutic or clinical application. As Miller points out, one exception has been Le Doux who postulates a form of collaboration between the cognitive and emotional systems, albeit its nature as yet not formulated. Miller argues cogently from a psychoanalytic and therapeutic perspective that the conscious mind can be brought into play but not until after the often very painful experience of confronting early childhood experiences and 're-feeling' them is done. Until then, she argues, the pains and memories stay repressed and serve as a barrier in the mind to a more fully conscious life in the present. Part of what that means, the argument goes, is that a person lives with an area of emotional blindness which causes behavior both inexplicable to themselves and perhaps ignorantly hurtful to self and other.

Like Le Doux, Miller claims that she doesn't know what the connection between the emotional knowledge of the body (the unconscious) and the cognitive faculties is, but she argues from clinical experience that it is there and it is something that can be formed in therapy. Perhaps though it is now time to make well-reasoned speculations that concur with clinical findings in the hope of serving the development of our children's EQ. It is also necessary if we are concerned with their schooling and academic pursuits, and their career prospects to attend to the direction in which the research is leading us. The physiological research points us in the direction of the necessity for more cognitive involvement in emotional processing, especially for purposes of warding off emotional dysfunction. Clinical psychology provides evidence for the necessity of left hemisphere involvement in correcting and perhaps even preventing certain behavior and emotional disorders. Whereas both the physiological and clinical findings concur in support of psychological tenets of an emotional unconscious whose structure and dynamics are laid down primarily in early childhood.

On the basis of his own research, Goleman concluded that success, measured by American standards, can be accounted for by 80% EQ and 20% IQ. It is not a far stretch of the mind to understand the sense these findings make. Children who cannot contain themselves in classrooms or their seats have little chance of concentrating on their school work, and children and adults who don't get along with others or can't communicate effectively have little hope of doing well even if they 'know their stuff.' As parents and teachers, the onus is upon us to make use of what research from all areas is alerting us to.

One way to start putting all this together is to integrate creative cognitive strategies in early childhood about the emotion when the emotion is happening. (Gazzard 2001) Ideally this type of approach would be made available for all children through education, not just for children in some sort of need, emotional or otherwise. All persons can benefit from understanding emotions more fully and from having access to more constructive, creative, meaningful and perhaps even productively useful ways to process emotion and its meaning.

Another component, however, must also be considered, namely, parent education, and indeed the training of early childhood educators in particular. First and foremost parental education could easily enhance the prevention of some of the mishaps in upbringing and communication with young

children that now often lead to much remedial work in later life. As previously argued, much of the responsibility for correcting the dialogues and interactions between parent and child at times of emotional difficulty is the burden of the adults. (Gazzard 2001) If Vygotsky is correct in claiming that thinking is internalized dialogue, then the thinking that takes place around emotional issues is going to be well-established early when those basic emotions are being experienced. Communication at these times that is fraught with negativity, blame, negligence, and so on, leaves little room for the conditioning of thinking in the child that itself is not dominated by equally biased patterns. Conditioned patterns of thinking so easily become established when these patterns of communication happen not just once or twice, but rather on a more regular basis.

Readily we accept the reality of the behaviorist principles of conditioning when it relates to overt behavior. Less readily it seems that we accept the same phenomenon when it applies to thoughts and feelings. Yet we don't have to look too far to find examples of this. Take for example the formation of prejudiced attitudes conditioned by family upbringing.

Given that we define ourselves to ourselves and to others largely by our feelings and thoughts about this, that, and the other, it would be advantageous for us to look more closely at this process of conditioning in the formation of our identity. Surely this is one of the things Kohlberg was discussing in his Post Conventional Level of Moral Reasoning. Although he was working within the framework of moral development, it is being able to consider oneself outside the bounds of one's culture that enables one to see the delimitations it has placed on one's identity in general, not just one's moral self.

Miller introduces us to the concept of «an enlightened witness» as part of the solution. Although her focus is upon overcoming emotional barriers or emotional blindness in adult life that accrue primarily from traumatic incidences of abuse in childhood, her notion of the importance of an enlightened witness seems applicable to all degrees of emotional awareness. For Miller, the 'enlightened witness' is somebody in the person's life, most likely the therapist, but not necessarily, who has done 'the work' themselves. That is to say, an enlightened witness is somebody who has personally been through the difficult process of getting in touch with blocked feelings from childhood, especially those feelings that were blocked because what was being done was in the name of 'what was good for you.' (Miller, 2001,121) It is not enough merely to 'know' what the issues were, as in more traditional therapy. For Miller, it is necessary to have returned to the feeling and understood it more experientially. It is only such a person who can guide others most successfully through their own return discoveries.

'The witness' as a self-developed part of oneself then would seem necessary for parents and teachers otherwise it would seem very unlikely that they could constructively contribute to the development of a child's emotional and cognitive makeup without transmitting conditioned patterns of feeling and thinking. Helping a child think clearly, for example, requires someone who can see the situation from many angles and as much as possible get outside the box of his/her own historical and cultural conditioning. In «Teaching To Transgress», Bell Hooks (1994) argues similarly when she asserts that one of the most important things a teacher needs to be engaged in is self-inquiry.⁴ It is difficult otherwise to control or minimize the unconscious indoctrination that necessarily happens. Self-inquiry, while not eliminating it, can certainly serve as a buffer to it.

Let us now then turn to consider EQ more generally and what this notion of 'a witness' may have to contribute.

THE WITNESS

'The witness' then is an important concept and an important aspect of personhood that has, up until now, been missing in discussions of emotional intelligence and its development. Whereas Miller used the term 'enlightened witness' to mean a person who could help someone else because of having explored the blocked emotions in his/her own psyche, the use of 'the witness' in this paper is more developmental. Here 'witness', while it may refer to somebody on the outside who can help the person in question, is mostly used to refer to a certain aspect within a person that can be developed over time through practice, training and effort.

It is that part of the person who can observe the behaviors stemming forth from both the left and right hemispheres of the brain and the instinctual brain, that is, it can observe the thinking self, the feeling self and the instinctual self, ideally with equal objectivity. It is that part of the person that can create the conditions for a behavior of choice, providing the vision of neutrality from which a more objective, less attached, less conditioned response can be formulated. It is not that part of the self that judges one's behavior, putting it into categories and then labeling it with negative or positive attributions, but rather it is that part that is free even too of this, it is that part that just 'sees'. The 'judge' is usually part of the conditioned self. How could it not be? How could it otherwise derive its notions of right and wrong? The witness is culture free, family free, it is the place from where conditioning can be seen. With regard to emotional intelligence this faculty is, we must admit, essential. What we are learning is that EQ is a function of different parts of the brain and that, as LeDoux reports, much has to do with the interpretation (cortical brain) of the felt experience. This enlightens us to the fact that how we have learned to understand the feeling contributes largely to what we ultimately experience as the emotion, yet it still leaves us bound by the paradigm within which that understanding was shaped. It is 'the witness', the other faculty which might allow a fleeting glimpse of the whole drama and which is necessary to access a vision of that paradigm by being momentarily outside of it.

There is no doubt that it is beneficial to develop the understanding that what we ultimately experience can be redirected by how we interpret it. Efforts to liberate an individual from suffering or restrictions that any one interpretation might bring can be made by helping the person develop, say their critical thinking abilities, and learning to interpret the situation differently. That is to say, people can learn to reframe their understanding of situations.

One could learn to interpret and understand situations in a variety of different ways and hence regulate a lot of emotion and responses that one might otherwise have which is all well and good. The question needs to be raised, though, whether or not this is a sufficient enough understanding of emotional intelligence? What about the freedom that might come from being able to watch the whole melodrama and experiencing a part of oneself that is not part of it? What about the freedom that might come by being able to smile and communicate from a part of oneself not confined to whatever the drama is demanding of one's psychophysical system at any given moment? Is this not more what emotionally intelligent behavior could be? What about the part of a person that could allow him/ her to momentarily see all of his/her processing and return bemusedly to the drama being less focused on the other person's behavior and more fascinated with his/her own. In other words, the whole drama could be recast to bring 'the witness' to all aspects of oneself.

It is from this place of the witness that we have the greatest hope of communicating most authentically with ourselves and with another. In being able, no matter how momentarily, to observe all aspects of ourselves we gain more and more ability to take a distance from any point of life's drama and our drama in it at any particular time. With regard to parenting and teaching, we are by definition entangled in the responsibility of enhancing and developing EQ in others by virtue of being more able presumably to see more clearly what is perhaps the underlying need or problem the child or student is having. The witness also seems a fairer place from where to approach and communicate with another. Once we appreciate that our psychophysical being is subjected to, and a product of, the environmental conditioning process, and rightly so, then to look beyond that to the person inside the other whose journey we more readily see than he/she, is more, I think, what we really thought we were doing in the first place.

Enabling the experience of the witness to come to the foreground is, I think, our best goal for EQ. Starting with children at a very young age, we as parents and teachers need to do whatever we can to create the conditions and opportunities for them to get in touch with the witness aspect of themselves. Without the compassionate appreciation that can come from understanding each other as persons inside struggling to overcome some aspects of the conditioning, struggling to recognize it and in many case struggling to manage it, we fail to relate to the experiencer, and instead, mistake the experience for the person.

Without the opportunity to experience oneself from this point of the witness, moreover, not only would it be difficult to be clear about one's own motivations and behavior but equally difficult would it be to understand that of others. Not only would an appreciation of the person inside the other be difficult but also any perception of their behavior would be blurred by the haze of one's own conditioning.

Moments of true observation, of seeing things just as they are, are remarkable for their clarity. Being that it is not always something desirable one sees about oneself, makes it not uncommon for people 'to run from' the observation. A lot of human behavior is of this nature. Freud used the terms 'ego defense mechanisms' to describe psychic phenomenon like denial, displacement and projection that served the same and similar purposes. Yet the observation in all its accuracy remains within, ultimately and eventually to be embraced without resistance. In so doing just once, future occasions are made less difficult if only by the recognition that the process of observing the observation and the reaction to the observation are common to all people. Not only is understanding of oneself embraced, but so too is necessarily an understanding of others.

It is not to recriminate oneself that these observations need to be encouraged. Rather it is so that one can clearly see oneself and one's actions for what they are. If one desired these behaviors to be different, then he/she would then have a place to begin to make the changes, a place of understanding and compassion. That one's intentions towards others are often clouded by self-interest and therefore may be undesirable to oneself is not the point. That would be merely a value judgment. It is more to the point that such observations reveal ourselves to ourselves, the nature of others to ourselves and provide an opportunity to self correct, if desired, through understanding the motives behind the behavior.

Young children are often taught «to be nice» to others, and what it means «to be nice» is often explained in behavioral terms. But the question needs to be raised «Is this sufficient, that is, this type of approach, for the development of emotional intelligence?» Without an understanding that could come perhaps through discussion of «good and bad» reasons for being nice and possible «good and bad» consequences of being nice, a child's appreciation of others' niceness might, for example, be dangerously naive. Similarly too, it leaves the door open for children to justify malicious or manipulative intentions that they might have towards others and/or themselves. In all aspects of human behavior, to foster EQ we have to dig a little deeper and we have to provide our children and students with the opportunity of a safe environment for that to happen.

Conditioning has its own momentum and its own agenda, and consequently, it is not uncommon for a person living inside their whole conditioned psychophysical self, to feel powerless to act, be or feel differently. The feeling of one's life being not in one's own hands can be conducive to feelings of powerlessness and depression. Of course, the issue raises many spiritual questions but that is not the debate preempted here. Whether one can change one's life or not and whether one would want to or not, the question still remains how to be happy inside the life one is living and inside the psychophysical unit through which one is experiencing it. Being able, with acute clarity and precision, to observe ourselves and see all underlying motivations, intentions, desires, and inhibitions framing our behavior, and at the same time, being able to experience that part of oneself that is not them, but that is free of them all, enables the freedom of personhood that is the birthright of all humankind. It is to this end that I wish to argue that EQ should now aim for herein lies the opportunity to be free of the grip, bind or bond of conditioning. It is not so much the nature of the conditioning which is important, as it is being able to recognize the process within ourselves, and not mistake who we are for what it is.

Miller makes the point that one of the things important about external witnesses is that they have done a lot of the work themselves already. In order to help people in the process of finding the observer within themselves thus beginning the process of deconditioning requires that the 'helper' be well along in that process for him/ herself. Certainly this would allow for the powerful learning tool of modeling and imitation to make its impact, but perhaps even more remarkable would be the dialogue that such a 'helper' could institute with the student or child, as teacher and /or parent. Having done a lot of the challenging work him/herself, enables the 'helper' to understand the tricks of the mind, the games the mind plays to resist letting go of past patterns. Whether the patterns have been positive or negative, successful or not, the resistance (letting go) is all the same. The mind can become very clever in protecting or defending itself from having to face the temporary void and unknown space that comes from letting go of an habitual way of thinking, feeling or doing until a new way emerges. Indeed, the extent of attachment even to negative emotions can be understood in these terms. For many, the familiar, no matter how unpleasant it may be, is often preferable to the discontent that the empty space experienced after giving up such a pattern brings. Enough time has to pass to allow a new pattern to be formulated and come into play. Experience with this is invaluable and probably necessary to help another through it, whether it be a child or an adult. Not only can that person help the other outwit the strategies of the mind's resistance, but he/she can also provide a framework for understanding the experience and useful suggestions for how that person might creatively move forward with new ways of thinking, feeling or doing. Moreover, he/ she provides for the other a 'knowing' companionship, a place where their concerns and struggles, feelings and thoughts are acknowledged and understood. Ultimately this is what we need to develop and have alive in ourselves.

On the one hand then we have this process of observation and on the other we have this process of self-reflection and self- inquiry ideally working together to foment the deconditioning.

Observation is important to see as clearly, as objectively, as honestly, and as sincerely as possible, the self for what it is. Self-inquiry and self-reflection become increasingly important if one wants to understand more deeply the connection between these observations and how the self functions within various situations. It is through the development of the logical thought processes required of inquiry that we are able to pierce through the tale that the psychological phenomena, (the conditioned patterns, that is), might otherwise tell us and have us believe as true. That is to say, the conditioned patterns of thoughts and feelings might lead us automatically and uncritically to believe a particular worldview or favor a particular perspective.⁵

For example, a white student might have been brought up with racial prejudice to believe that Black people are bad. As a result he/she avoids playing or interacting with Black children at school as much as possible. However, the teacher assigns him/her on a class project to work as a partner with B, a Black student. (A) is a bit afraid and a bit resistant. As time goes by (A) notices, in fleeting moments of honesty, fond feelings developing for (B). (A) sees that (B) is fair, shares responsibility, likes (A), helps (A), etc. Many of the things (A) learns about (B) fly in the face of a lot of what (A) previously thought about (B) based on no real knowledge or experience of (B) only an assumption based on family beliefs about African-American culture. Through careful self-reflection and indeed with help if possible, (A) could come to counter his/her prejudiced belief with the systematic step by step placement of experience of (B) against previously held beliefs about (B). It would be for (A) like shooting bullets through each prejudicial belief. Each shot would be with direct experience as a counter instance to an already held belief.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Firstly, I would like to suggest that Daniel Goleman's definition of EQ is not sufficiently comprehensive. It is not enough just to know what one is feeling and be able to communicate it. One needs also to know why one feels the way one does, that is, if one ultimately hopes to be free of the dictates of emotion.

Secondly, the development of the witness is crucial in other aspects of education. At some point we need to consider who we are teaching when we teach. We need to question what we are teaching to or educating in the person when we teach. Without an understanding of the witness and appeals to teach to it, we merely contribute further to the conditioned patterns of the psychophysical unit. This does not necessarily need to be a bad thing. That is to say, the conditioning we may offer may be very positive and indeed may contribute greatly towards enhancing positive emotional experiences or learning positive interpretations of life experiences. In order to contribute more directly, however, to emotional development and the ability to experience emotion without becoming a victim of it, we need to appeal more to the witness aspect of our students. We need to appeal to that part of the person that is not the emotional state, that is not the thinking state, but that is rather the one who is the observer of them. We also need to stay alert to the close relationships between emotion or feeling and truth. Our experience all too easily reveals to us a tight connection between them. We know that when people are

emotionally upset, the perception of what is true can be very different from when they are not in that state. We know too that when people are upset emotionally it is quite a common experience for them to report 'not being able to think straight.' We are challenged then further to develop an awareness that can be an impartial and objective observer.

Finally, I would like to suggest that we keep in mind the use to which we put the physiological research findings. While there is no doubt that much important scientific research on the neural pathways of emotion, most notably the work of Joseph Le Doux, has been forthcoming, I think it is important to consider that with most research we are in the territory of the conditioning. Important as it may be to discover the physiological basis of emotion, conditioned and otherwise, we have to be careful not to allow the brain research to circumvent otherwise important speculative clinical proposals. While it is true that we need to figure out how to enhance our own EQ as well as that of others, and although the neuro-physiological work is extensive, the findings may disproportionately yield only a fragment of the solution. That is to say, they may, if correct, be only applicable to conditioned emotion. Theories go in and out of vogue. Therefore, whatever we can appropriate from these findings by way of formulating an understanding or strategy for working with EQ is beneficial only in so far as it makes good sense and is practically feasible to any of those who might attempt to use it. In other words, these findings may help us devise ways to understand and enhance EQ, but they should make sense to us even if the physiological research understanding might change. The real test of application is not if the theory continues to remain true, but rather if the application continues to give the desired results.

NOTES

1. More recently LeDoux (1996) has argued that the evidence does not support the existence of a limbic system. He argues rather that emotional processing takes place throughout many areas of the brain depending largely upon the area of survival to which the emotion in question relates.

2. Personal notes taken from a therapist-training workshop conducted by Dr Greene at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, March 23rd, 2001.

3. The use of color and art to express emotion, the use of poetry and writing to communicate feelings, and the use of creative play, drama and role play are all ways children can be encouraged to release emotions as they are happening. At the same time, they are also ways to gain insight into those emotions. Cortical pathways in emotional processing may, in so doing, be activated, created and/or strengthened.

4. It is not so much that the argument is stated specifically in any one place, but rather it is one of the themes running through the book.

5. Two examples further serve to illustrate the point. Alice Miller writes,

Emotional Blindness can be well studied by examining the careens of sect members. Jehovah Witnesses, for example, are in favor of corporal punishment and constantly warn that the end of the world is near. They are not aware that they bear within themselves the abused children they once were, and that they already experienced the end of the world when their loving parents beat them. ... The reality of the end of the world is constantly on their minds, but they do not know why. (Miller 2001, 126)

Bell Hooks (2002) attempts to show the pervasiveness of patriarchy. As an example she castigates John Gray's very popular book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, on the grounds that

it attempts to provide advice for human relationships designed from within the overarching framework of patriarchy itself.

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