



Emotional Literacy in the UK
Report for the EL4VET Project
March 2011

Emotional Literacy (EL), or Emotional Intelligence if you prefer, is a perspective that helps us to recognise, understand, interpret and manage our own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others. It is about using emotions effectively. Research suggests that EL and not IQ shapes as much as 70% - 80% of our success. Emotional Literacy is influenced by the positive psychology field which puts emphasis on happiness, optimism, caring and relationships. It is said that all behaviour has an emotional base and that there is a correlation between thinking, feeling and behaviour.

Emotional Literacy then provides us with the resilience or capacity to help us to gain control and persevere when faced with difficult situations, disappointments or other challenges. This emotional resiliency is especially important here given at least, and probably more than 1 out of every 10 young people are said to experience depression. According to a recent United Nations report (2007):

“Children growing up in the United Kingdom are at the bottom of the league tables of the most economically advanced countries. They suffer greater deprivation, have worse relationships with their parents and society and are exposed to more risk from alcohol, drugs and have unsafe sex”.

Emotional Literacy therefore then helps us to prevent “at risk” behaviours and develop the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills needed to engage, develop better relationships and communicate more effectively with young people.

Over the last 12 years, Emotional Literacy has gained attention and prominence with various audiences; business and leadership development have been the most visible areas to highlight the benefits of Emotional Literacy, but more recently, emotional literacy has been extended to customer service, communication skill training, mental health, research, medical communities and education. In fact the Government has invested millions of pounds into social/emotional initiatives such as: SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) and positive psychology programmes pioneered by Professor Martin Seligman for our schools to raise academic performance, motivate young people and better manage classroom behaviour.

Recently more and more research has been conducted by academics to use EL in classrooms with success, to raise attainment and manage behaviours more effectively. The Government has invested in positive psychology programmes pioneered by Professor Seligman for our schools to raise academic performance, motivate young people and better manage classroom behaviour. Currently there are a number of schools piloting these programmes with success. Research has shown that when staff and students feel good about themselves, they perform better and students’ behaviour improves. Personal feelings affect behaviour, motivate, relationships and health and social development.

The newly elected Conservative Government in the UK want to change the country's education system radically. Michael Gove, the Minister for Education is keen to improve the standards of teaching, introducing reforms such as only funding teacher training for those with degrees higher than third class degrees and increasing the recommended hours head teachers can perform classroom observations in schools (currently 3 hours each year is recommended by the Performance Management Regulations, 2006). Gove puts particular emphasis on not only encouraging the highest academic achievers into the profession but also putting them through rigorous selection assessments including measuring applicants' character and emotional intelligence.

Michael Gove believes "As a general rule, the smarter an individual is in terms of IQ and EQ the more opportunity for that person to be a great teacher" (The Guardian, 2010). However, Gove's belief that teaching is a "craft of Pedagogy" has attracted criticism from some sources. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) say that Gove's reforms are ideological and that far from being a "craft", teaching is a profession built on a solid foundation of strong theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

The UK is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of Emotional Literacy in society. A new centre has been formed, the Applied Centre for Emotional Literacy, Leadership and Research, headed by Dr Richard Majors and supported by City of Wolverhampton College. The purpose of the centre is in recognition of the fact that although there are many social/emotional training interventions in the UK, Emotional Literacy has lacked an adequate framework or infrastructure to promote or advance the field.

With the UK Government keen to explore the benefits of Emotional Literacy to the teaching profession and establishing how this might be done, there appears to be a need for people with the knowledge and skills around Emotional Literacy to come to the fore. Projects such as the Leonardo-funded EL4VET project, led by Dr Richard Majors, which is centred around Dr Majors training vocational teachers in 6 other European countries, need to be encouraged and not only for the education sector but also other areas such as social work, the health service and business.

References

Williams, R. (15th November 2010) Teachers Need Emotional as Well as Academic Intelligence, Says Gove, *The Guardian* (online).

www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010. Accessed via Google.

Smith, R. (24th November 2010) School Teaching and Funding Overhaul Planned in England *BBC News – Politics* (online).

www.bbc.co.uk/news/UK/politics. Accessed via Google.

Majors, R. (2009) ACELLR, City of Wolverhampton College (online).

www.acellr.com. Accessed via Google.