

ELT CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES STUDENT CENTRED APPROACHES

The theory of Emotional Intelligence and its measurement, the Emotional Quotient (EQ) were developed in the 1970s and 80s but popularised by Daniel Goleman in the mid-90s.

EQ is one of many concepts and models originating in psychology which are being incorporated into language teaching.

Goleman defines EQ as 'the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.'

The theory has been applied extensively in the business world, but has also become a focus of attention in education as the result of research which shows that successive generations are becoming less emotionally aware.

Changes in family structure, the reduced role of parents in education, mobility and technology are seen as contributing factors leading to the necessity to develop EQ at all levels of education and across the curriculum.

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EQ Theory

EQ theory argues that conventional measurements of intelligence ignore behaviour and character and that success in education or the business world requires academic ability but also equivalent social skills.

EQ might be seen as a complement to Multiple Intelligence theory, while there are very strong links between EQ and behavioural models and theories such as Transactional Analysis, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.

Daniel Goleman identifies five 'domains' of EQ:

Self-awareness - Recognising and being able to name our feelings.

Motivation - The ability to keep going despite failures.

Self-regulation - The way we handle our emotions to avoid negative effects.

Empathy - The ability to read the emotions of others.

Adeptness - Being sensitive to the feelings of others and handling them appropriately to build positive relationships.

EQ and ELT

Because EQ is about understanding and assessing behaviour patterns it is relevant to the development of both the individual and the organisation.

In education, it applies to the institution, teachers and students through promoting academic success while reducing anxiety and negative feelings during the learning process.

At the same time, patterns for future life are established while skills are developed that are in demand by employers.

At an institutional level, the emphasis is on creating an environment conducive to raising students' EQ. Much of this involves creating a sense of identity, safety and value. In this way, institutions and teachers are responsible for fostering:

Attachment – A sense of belonging to the school or university.

Reassurance – That others experience difficulties.

Bonding – Facilitating the formation of friendships.

Induction – Informing students of what is available.

Training – In study skills, time management and stress reduction.

Holism – Balancing academic learning with physical and social activities.

In the language classroom, all the above apply and are the responsibility of the teacher, but attention to EQ faces the additional considerations of emotional literacy (the ability to express emotions) in L2, and the necessity for good group dynamics and student interaction.

In the days of rote-learning and the teacher-centre classroom, interrelationships among the group were not vital, but in communicative language teaching, where pair and group work are the norm, support and co-operation between learners is essential.

Teenage learners in particular are often reluctant to co-operate, often as a result of repressed fear, anxiety and anger rather than linguistic inability, and are unlikely to learn much in a student-centred classroom.

Thus, the teacher needs to focus on areas of language used to express emotions, and on classroom techniques which will reduce tension and produce better group dynamics.

Teaching techniques

EI is developed through activities which promote the sharing of ideas and communication in the classroom.

Techniques which are already part of the teacher's repertoire of confidence-building activities are emphasised:

A variety of activities maintains interest and allows for different approaches to learning and individual learning styles.

Ice breakers, warmers and mingle activities help students get to know each other and promote interest in lessons if they are related to the topic area.

Brainstorming and discussion encourages the sharing of knowledge and opinions.

For some learners, it is easier to reveal themselves through a fictitious role. However, role-plays and simulations should be carefully set up and related to the real world.

Guided fantasy and drama techniques are useful tools in guiding learners into their roles.

Group work encourages cooperation. Group composition should be changed often since there is a tendency for high EQ students to work together, but EQ can be also learned by example.

Tasks should be designed so that all members have to contribute and have the same outcome.

Collaborative reading and writing activities as well as group speaking activities may be utilised.

For project work, students are often competitive. Group completion of assessed and unassessed projects also encourages cooperation.

Giving feedback on performance and making clear what is expected. Feedback should be specific, objective and focused on an aspect of performance that the student is able to change.

Getting feedback on tasks and how students felt during the task.

Continuous assessment allows all positive aspects of a student's performance to be assessed and rewarded including their contribution to the group.

The language of EQ

The most difficult task for the teacher in teaching the language of emotions is persuading learners to state their feelings directly, since we all have a tendency to over-complicate how we feel and / or blame another person.

A frightened passenger in a car is more likely to say 'You're driving a bit too fast, aren't you?' (meaning

please slow down) or 'You're driving like a maniac' (blaming the driver) rather than 'I'm scared'.

The language teacher, however, has the advantage of being able to encourage learners to use the simple language of emotions before they have the range of language to complicate matters.

The language itself consists mainly of a few main verbs, a variety of adjectives, and the use of modals, but is best seen in terms of functions:

Function Language

Labelling feelings

I feel / I am angry / impatient / bitter / frightened

Taking responsibility for feelings

I feel jealous / hurt / left out

Empathising

I understand / accept / realise

Suggesting

I / you could / might

Stating wants and needs

I / you need / would like / want to

Being positive

I'd feel better if

There is also language to be avoided, mainly to do with the functions of giving commands and strong advice (I / you should), obligation (I / you must) and blaming (you're insensitive, you're making me jealous).

Classroom activities

Language practice materials designed for the global market are often criticised for being too general, not relevant to individual learning groups and unnatural.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt materials to suit local needs. EQ development requires that teachers also adapt materials to enable learners to find out about each other's interests, habits, preferences and characters, both to stimulate discussion and to strengthen intra-group relationships.

Some standard activities already encourage learners to reveal something about themselves (If I found a wallet in the street I'd.....), but many are impersonal, 'closed', in that follow-up questions are not required, or tend to produce unnatural responses.

A good example is the kind of questions often used to practise frequency adverbs.

Questions such as 'How often do you watch television / play football with your friends / play computer games / go shopping?' are unlikely to

produce responses which are revealing, unpredictable or interesting enough to follow up.

How often do you....

very often

often

sometimes

rarely

never

laugh

get angry

argue with your parents

make mistakes

forget things

change your mind

really enjoy yourself

The questions above require responses which say something about the speaker and provide opportunities for further questions and for the teacher to feed in some extra useful language.

In this case, students fill in the table before asking and answering questions, allowing time to think of 'real' responses and recall actual incidents from their own lives.

'Personalised grammar' promotes meaningful interaction.

Conclusion

Developing EQ and good communicative language teaching go hand in hand, however the group dynamics necessary for meaningful interaction in the classroom do not occur automatically, but need to be fostered through techniques which build confidence, create a positive classroom atmosphere and encourage co-operation.

Personalised language practice is affective in that it encourages learners to talk about themselves and their feelings while making the use of the language relevant, interesting and therefore memorable.