The Emotionally Intelligent Lifelong Learner

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Introduction

There are numerous reasons why Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is relevant to lifelong learning, but they can all be grasped under three main categories: humans are emotional beings from the cradle to the grave and emotional learning is the earliest and most influential form of learning albeit initially subconscious; because early learning is unconscious and because most 'advanced' industrial societies value intellectual ability (IQ) above abilities based on feeling and intuition, the effort to accrue additional learning about the emotional element in our thinking and action is essential for optimal behavior, particularly in social settings; in addition to being relevant to all life stages, EQ does not discriminate. While a knowledge of, for example, the novels of Rudyard Kipling may denote high status in many countries, in others it is seen as showing deference to colonial oppression or male

dominance. On the other hand knowing how to turn fear into confidence or anger into energized and productive action is something that is valuable to all regardless of culture, gender or any other difference.

What is EQ & Why do we need it?

A useful way to start to understand the role of EQ in learning is to look at motivation since without this poorly understood form of energy no learning is possible at any age. Motivation is defined by Gardner as "the force that gives behavior its energy and direction" and it has been clearly demonstrated to be an essential component of successful language learning (MacIntyre & Serroul, 2014). In a meta-analysis of studies investigating the relationship of achievement with attitudes and motivation in a total of 10,489 individuals Masgoret & Gardner (2003) found a strong .37 correlation between motivation and three measures of achievement (grades; self-report; objective measures such as cloze and grammar tests). There can be few teachers who are surprised by this and who don't recognize the absence of motivation when they see it: listless, aimless wandering of mind and body and the feeling that if you, the teacher, don't lift the pen or work the jaws yourself there will be little or no output between now and the tolling of the lunch bell (immediately after which the desire to communicate will magically return and behavior will suddenly become highly energized and goal directed). The *presence* of motivation during a class is equally easy to recognize, and certainly has to do with positive emotional and intellectual states, but what precisely is this mysterious force that creates so much of the difference between an energizing, satisfying class in which learning takes place and a draining, dispiriting one in which it does not?

A helpful way to look at motivation is to begin with a simple behaviorist view. In the diagram below (figure1) focusing only on the visible and comparatively quantifiable stimulus and reactive response elements gives the impression that behavior, for example studying hard before a test, is the result of 'instrumental' stimuli such as the

promise of good grades, approval from parents and teachers, or being better than others. I believe it is uncontroversial that these things are powerful motivators, just as money (the instrumental motivator *par excellence*) is almost universally accepted as a necessary, though insufficient condition for effort in work.

However, this compelling but ultimately simplistic view is very far from the whole story. Intense research focus on what happens in between the stimulus and the response (labelled 'Freedom to Choose' in the diagram) began with Noam Chomsky's (1959) masterful and devastating review of infamous behaviorist B.F. Skinner's tome 'Verbal Behavior'. Plenty has been written about this and it is enough to say here that it is now generally accepted that how much time and effort any particular learner devotes to learning something depends not only on the incentives on offer, but also on harder to quantify and less predictable factors such as how individuals perceive the incentives, how they feel about the teacher and the course, and how closely the totality of the learning environment fits with their current development needs (Reyes, 2012). Put simply, humans are more complex and less predictable than rats and chickens.

It is possible of course that humans in fact are quite like lower mammals, but that they just have a far wider range of reactions based on their highly complex emotional and mental systems. Looked at this way, the behaviorist view is correct and it is simply taking a lot more time than Skinner anticipated to catalogue the full range of our ultimately predictable responses to stimuli. Interesting though it may be to ponder this philosophical question, more useful for anyone who is looking to understand motivation in a way that helps improve learning success, is to consider what kind of responses to inputs such as instructions, requirements, suggested activities and the overall learning environment are of the greatest benefit and how they can be encouraged by modifying these input variables.

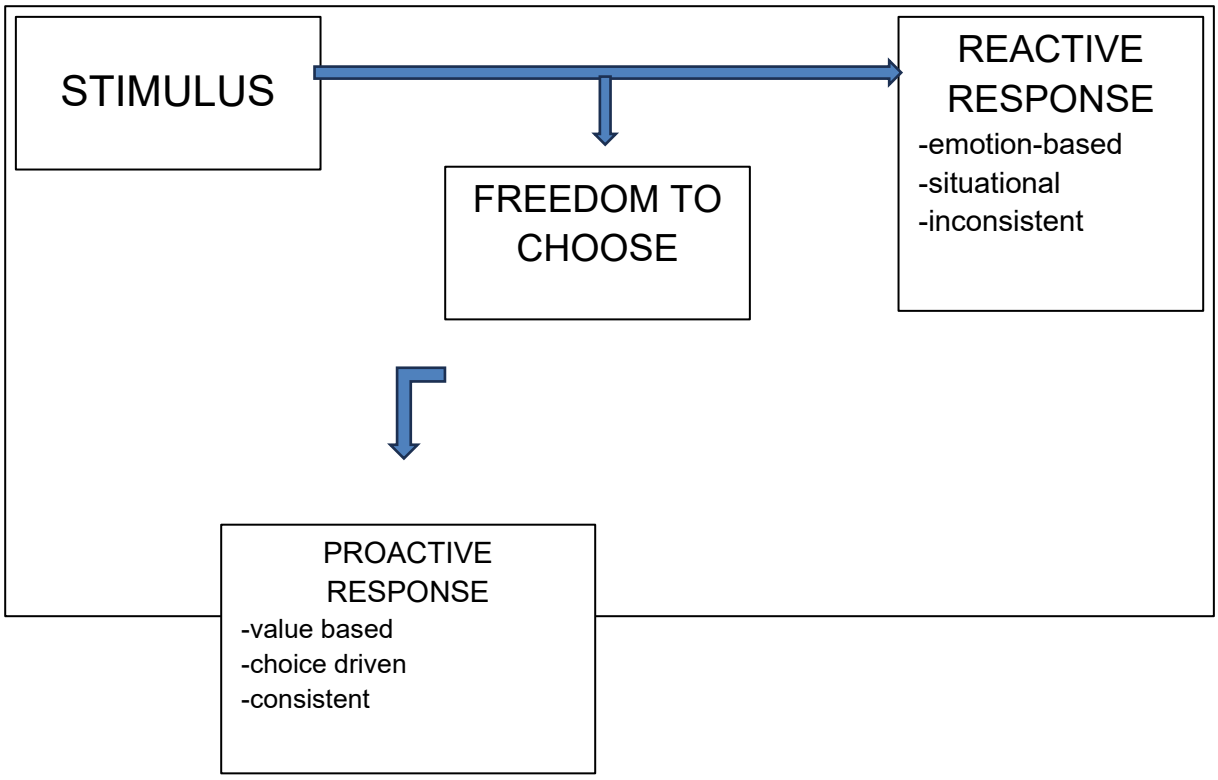

Figure 1: Adapted From Stephen Covey 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People'

Emotional Intelligence Defined

Daniel Goleman (1995) defines Emotional Intelligence as: "...a range of emotional responses controlled by us and appropriate in any given context." This definition covers two of the three elements of 'Reactive Responses' listed in figure one. The 'control' part of Goleman's definition, which refers to a rational and cognitive rather than emotional process, is what makes the response 'consistent' and takes us into the territory of proactivity. Note therefore that both *reactivity* and *proactivity* are essential to emotionally intelligent behavior, a reactive emotional state being one triggered automatically without thought or intention while a proactive response is the result of exercising your freedom to choose. Emotion in essence is a rich source of energy which has potential regardless of how it arises and its presence in any learning situation is not only desirable, but

essential for motivation which, as we have seen, is a cornerstone of progress.

According to Goleman, EQ is a potential with which evolution has equipped humans. Thus its purpose is to enable adaptive behavior - to give us tools which will help us survive and thrive. However, due to the rapid rate of social and technological change in industrial societies which has outpaced the maturation of human endowments such as our emotional systems and moral sense, "We too often confront postmodern dilemmas with an emotional repertoire tailored to the urgencies of the Pleistocene." (Goleman, 1995) This means that there is huge potential for all of us to be better educated in the ways of EI - to be more aware of the powerful and extensive emotions that flow through all of us and to apply our cognitive powers to make the best use of these rich resources which provide us with not only energy but also information that can help us to make better decisions about how to act "in any given context."

Modelling Emotions

How should we think about emotions? Clearly not all emotions are helpful for learning, so there is a need to distinguish between those we would like to cultivate and those we would like to weed out. It can be argued that the categorization of emotions or thoughts as either positive or negative is overly simplistic. However, the brain is a dynamic system (McKenna, McMullen, & Shlesinger, 1994) which, much like the wiring in your house, works on a principle of positive and negative charges and on-off switches. And anyone who has ever tried to do anything more difficult than change a fuse and ended up turning to an expert electrician for help will know that this magical system is very far from simple and, when it is functioning as it should, produces results that are simultaneously remarkable and endlessly useful. Thus I offer the following scheme as a way to think about emotional states (figure 2).

	Negative	Positive
High Energy	*C. No Grow Zone* Fear Anger Revulsion Disgust Anxiety? Contempt	*A. Game Zone* Play Exploration Pleasure Interest Creativity Excitement Inspiration Confidence Courage
Low Energy	*D. No Grow Zone* Boredom Inadequacy Disappointment Sadness Helplessness Shame Anxiety?	*B. Comfort Zone* Relaxation Safety Contentment Positive expectation

Figure 2: Adapted From 'Ninja Selling by Larry Kendall, 2017'

Emotions are the province of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) which is a blanket term referring to two subsystems: the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) and the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS). Emotions in the negative column in figure 2

are experienced subjectively when the SNS is engaged and those in the positive column are associated with PNS states. Labelling emotions negative does not mean they are wrong or unnatural or even that they are not adaptive. They are after all found in all human cultures (Eckman, 1972) and have presumably evolved for a reason and, as Daniel Kahneman has said, "In a functional sense all emotions are adaptive." (quoted in McIntyre & Mercer, 2014) Rather, 'negative' emotions are those that are associated with the fight-flight-freeze survival instinct and thus help us to *not* die. Fear, for example, alerts us to danger and readies us to escape it; anger focusses our resources on winning a fight against a mortal threat; and sadness directs us to drop out of the action and fly beneath the radar while we consider the best course of future action.

Positive emotions on the other hand arise when 'mere' survival is assumed. Take creativity for example. If your life is threatened, it is intelligent to be creative in locating possible escape routes, but far less so to get out your sketch pad and knock off a quick portrait of your attacker. And it is the latter that you would want to perfect in an art class. Education can thus be characterized as the domain of positive emotions because it is only when the PNS is engaged the majority of the time that real learning and growth can take place. However, it is certainly possible to have too much of a good thing and spending large amounts of time in a highly energized state (the 'Game Zone' in figure 2) will become stressful and is likely to tip an individual into negativity. Too much excitement for example can result in anxiety or exhaustion and "High levels of motivation, plus high anxiety, plus intense effort, plus frustration is not a sustainable state in the long run" (McIntyre & Serroul, 2014). Thus the default state should be a relatively low energy positive one (the 'Comfort Zone in figure 2). Imagine for example an athlete who hangs out at a training session in a focused, but relaxed state - at times s/he does repetitive practice, sometimes full on sprints, sometimes s/he sits and listens to a trainer or chats to friends - all with the purpose of becoming fit for a full energy effort in an upcoming competition. I believe this is how optimum learning should also operate.

Negative Narrowing Emotions & Positive Broadening Emotions

High energy negative emotion encourages a narrow focus of attention and "predisposes specific action tendencies" (Seligman, quoted in McIntyre & Mercer, 2014). At first glance there appear to be obvious uses for this state such as passing tests and producing essays to a deadline. Fear of failure is certainly a strong motivator, but useful fear is hard to sustain over the timescales needed to learn test material or make a good job of a complex assignment and it tends to bleed into anxiety, a state which reduces focus and often leads to avoidance behaviors (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). As Xiaoyan Du puts it: "The pressure to perform well on exams is a great motivator unless it is so extreme that it becomes irrational." Further, perfectionism and/or feelings of unworthiness can lead to the setting of unreasonable goals which, especially if they become too tied up with self-esteem, can have devastating consequences (Du, 2009). There are at least two broad ways to resolve this paradox. One is to start with fear and quickly transform it into something more appropriate and durable such as courage or determination. The other is to greatly reduce the part played by fear by acting directly from wants, values or principles by means of the imagination. Although, as with so many supposedly either-or phenomena, these two methods are not mutually exclusive, it is the latter path I will follow here saving a detailed investigation of the mechanisms by which fear and other negative emotions might be transformed for another time.

Barbara Fredrickson's broaden and build theory states that:

> *...certain discrete positive emotions – including joy, interest, contentment, pride, and love – although phenomenologically distinct, all share the ability to broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources. (Barbara Fredrickson p.219, quoted in MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012)*

In other words, positive emotions are more than the flip side of the emotional coin, they actively and independently produce health and well-being. This is the very definition of proactivity: it does not require a predetermined stimulus-response association to get into energized action. What this means in practice is that the brief jolt of energy that the words "remember this as it could be on the test" create in a classroom may be less desirable than the potentially sustainable flow of positive emotional energy released by a question such as: How do you see your future? followed by something like: How does becoming a better English speaker serve that goal? Such questions, which are an appeal to the imagination of the learner and an invitation to express their unique individuality also imply a *feeling* which, although it cannot be predicted in advance, is in my experience almost invariably positive.

A useful distinction offered by Baumgartner, Pieters and Bagozzi (2008) is that between *anticipatory* emotion and *anticipated* emotion. The former is a current emotion based on a hoped-for future event. For example, feeling excited at the prospect of a study abroad trip. The latter is an imagined emotion that will be the likely result of something that is hoped will happen in the future such as feeling happy in response to the approval of your parents after passing an entrance exam. To state the obvious, what both kinds of emotion have in common is that they are elicited by imagining a state of being that is wanted but is not yet reality.

There is power in this discrepancy between the positive imagined future self and the current reality since it creates a desire to close the gap - or to put it more technically to reduce 'cognitive dissonance'. This desire is, however, only elicited if it is both noticed and arouses an emotional reaction of some kind (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). This reaction doesn't have to be a positive one since the feared future self (McIntyre & Gregerson, 2012) also has a role to play in motivation. I have seen this truth in action, on a small scale, on many occasions when I have required students to prepare for and give a presentation in class. If I have designed the assignment effectively and presented it to students in a way that engages their interest, they will in most

cases want to make a good job of it and will probably have some idea of what success looks like (them speaking fluently, listeners attentive, etc.). If I then arrange a practice run a few weeks before presentation day it will, again in most cases, serve as a stark revelation of how much they still have to do. In other words they are staring their feared future self in the face and the shock gets them focused on putting in the work necessary to become their better self on the big day.

It occurs to me that it might be helpful to spend some time at the beginning of this process not only eliciting from students what factors they believe constitute a good presentation (speaking clearly and logically etc.) but also to invite them to imagine who they are when they are giving the best performance they are capable of. There is evidence (e.g. Jack et al., 2023) that tapping into the ideal self in this way creates the kind of positive emotion that broadens thought and action possibilities and builds resources in the way Fredrickson has described, whereas focusing too early or too much on what Dornyei and Chan (2013) call the 'ought to self' has a narrowing effect - focusing minds on 'not getting it wrong' which puts them in an SNS, fight-flight state and reduces the opportunities for learning. Referring back to the anticipatory/anticipated distinction we can now see how it would also be helpful to invite students to note how they feel when they imagine their future self and to imagine the emotions they may experience when it becomes reality.

Translating Adaptive Emotional States Into Intellectual Progress

McIntyre and Mercer (2014) write that: "...one of the goals is to foster the positivity of our learner's educational experiences and support them as individuals in reaching their personal highest levels of achievement and success." This nicely expresses how I also feel about what constitutes a good course in a university and perhaps any institution of learning. Looking back on my own early schooling, I can clearly see that this philosophy was very far from being consistently applied by my teachers and the institutions they were a part of. My university education was very different in all the good ways mentioned

above and I believe it is partly this gap, having first-hand experience of the impact that education done well and done badly has on the development of an intellectually curious mind that wants very badly to grow, that has motivated my own teaching career and struggle to understand what exactly it is that makes the difference. After more than 20 years of teaching, reading and thinking about it I am very sure now that motivation is one of a small number of fundamental keys to this difference and that emotion is the largest part of the force that energizes student behavior both adaptively directed and less so. If we recognize our students as individuals we will realize that what represents success for them will be at least a little different in each case. For some students just getting through this two to four year experience they never asked for is all they want, especially the English language part which they asked for even less. Others are motivated to achieve high grades and to excel in extrinsically measurable ways and will hope to go on to further academic, business or other successes. And some, I do believe, genuinely just love learning and are motivated by intrinsic factors that they and we would struggle to find a rational explanation for. Our role is not to judge, but it is to educate which, in a university, means encouraging intellectual progress, albeit necessarily broadly defined. I believe that greater awareness of the classroom emotional climate can reveal the sometimes subtle ways in which students show their willingness to grow their minds and that adding some emotional tools to their repertoire can help teachers with the delicate process of harnessing this embryonic willingness in the service of the enrichment of all concerned. I hope this paper has helped at least a little with this noble endeavor.

Beyond the Classroom: How EQ forms a significant part of coaching

In recent years, coaching has gained significant recognition and value among both organizations and individuals. This is partly due to the perception that ‘the only constant in modern organizations is change’.

Whitmore (2017) characterizes coaching as “emotional intelligence in practice”. He further introduces the concept of a "coaching mind"—a mindset that extends beyond professional coaches and offers benefits to individuals across various roles and contexts. In creating high-performance cultures, “hierarchy gives way to partnership and collaboration” (Whitmore, 2017, p. 24).

In his book Coaching for Performance, Whitmore explains how his GROW model can be an indispensable resource for facilitating structured coaching conversations, enhancing goal clarity, and empowering individuals to take ownership of their personal and professional development. This model fits nicely with the idea of the future imagined self (G = Goal) creating a productive contrast to the current reality (R) as discussed above. In the model ‘O’ stands for Options and in a coaching session brainstorming is used to generate alternative strategies or courses of action which may facilitate the journey from the current less than satisfactory reality to a desired future. Finally, ‘W’ focusses on accountability, to make sure that the client commits to action. This is framed as one or more questions by the coach: What *will* you do? How *will* you be accountable for following through with your chosen action step?

Organizations benefit from the adoption of a ‘coaching mindset’ by moving away from a command-and-control form of leadership to a more inclusive and collaborative culture. This is illustrated by another of. Whitmore’s coaching models which uses a pyramid similar to that of Maslow’s famous hierarchy of needs (see figure 3). It posits that people are on one of three layers, progressing from being Dependent to Independent, and then finally Interdependent. At the bottom tier, the Dependent stage, people follow the rules and do what they are told; at the Independent stage people take responsibility for their own performance; at the top of the pyramid people become Interdependent, which is to say truly successful together - meaning and purpose uniting with a heightened awareness and responsibility to self and others (Whitmore, 2017).

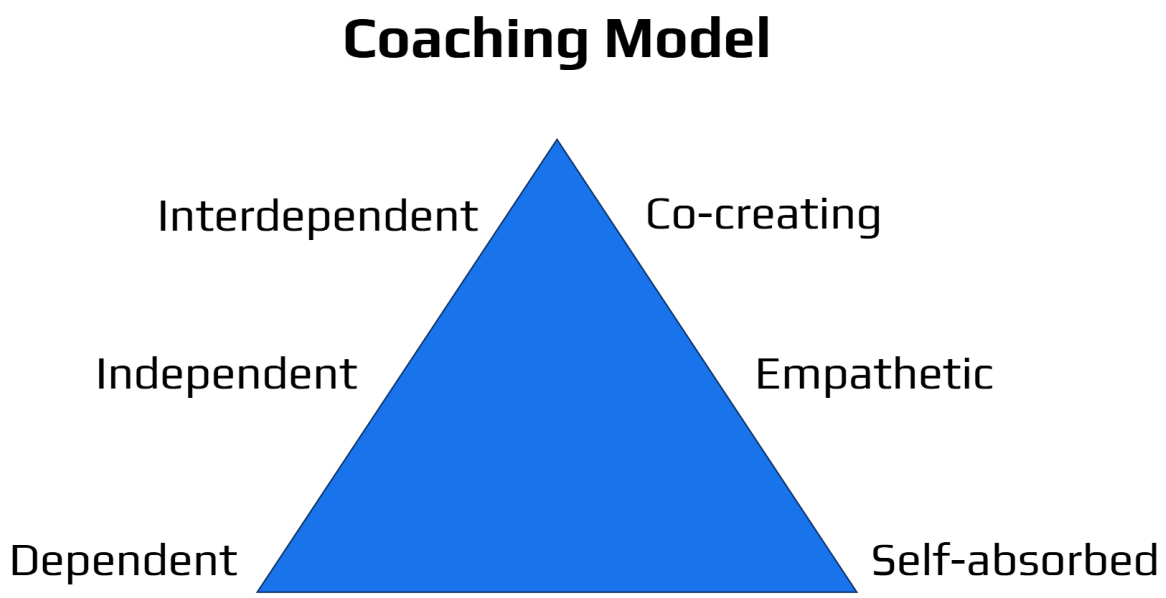

Figure 3: An Interpretation of Whitmore's Coaching Model

Turn the Ship Around!

Nowhere can the effectiveness of creating a coaching culture have been tested to the limits more than in an experiment conducted on a nuclear submarine, an environment notorious for strict discipline and a command-and-control mode of operation. In his book *Turn the Ship Around!*, L. David Marquet tells the compelling true account of how he was requested to take the helm of a submarine (USS Santa Fe) that was branded as the worst on the submarine force. When he boarded the submarine for the first time, he noticed how the crew were behaving; they "were at the bottom of the fleet – technically, operationally, and emotionally" —in other words the crew were bumping along the bottom of the Dependent stage of Whitmore's pyramid. What led to him deciding to take a whole new approach was when he discovered that he was on a submarine that had a different operating system to those that he was familiar with. During a drill, he gave an order, but because this submarine was different, the wrong coordinates were entered by the crew, who knew of the error but would only follow his instructions. As a result, the vessel was heading

right into harm's way of the enemy. He thus realized that he had a genuine need to rely on the crew, but that their unthinking compliance made them unreliable. This led him to set up systems that delegated responsibilities to his crew more, especially supervisors, who until then had mere job titles which gave them little incentive to take responsibility.

Marquet also modified his language, using phrases that avoided the need to give orders for every piece of work, encouraging crew to use expressions such as "I intend to…" This empowered his crew to think for themselves. Marquet's innovation helped "turn passive followers into active leaders" (Marquet, 2015, p. 81). He cites a number of other mechanisms designed to foster a leader-leader culture such as the benefit of thinking out loud: prior to any action, an operator would vocalize what he/she was doing or about to do, so that other crew members knew what he was going to do next, which resulted not only in fewer mistakes, but operational excellence due to improved communication (Marquet, 2015, p. 105). Such initiatives helped transition the crew toward the desired Interdependent stage of Whitmore's pyramid.

By the end of Marquet's tenure, his submarine had become a model for the fleet. The crew were interdependent, and he could leave his post confident that the culture was strong enough to remain unchanged, regardless of who succeeded him. All too often, we hear something akin to: "That CEO was loved by everyone and will be missed." While this might make that CEO feel indispensable, the organization may suffer when he/she leaves, since all of the responsibility was pinned on that one person. Organizations are becoming all the more complex and a more decentralized leadership structure is likely to be more sustainable. As the submarine experiment clearly demonstrates, this does not happen naturally but rather is a result of intelligent choices and deliberate effort. Coaching, we would like to suggest, is an excellent tool for encouraging and guiding the continual learning that lies at the heart of social and organizational adaptation and sustainable growth.

The Changing Landscape of Work

Graduates from Japanese universities have become less interested in joining a large company immediately after finishing their studies and staying there for the entirety of their working life. In Japan, it is customary for new university graduates to begin working at companies in April, coinciding with the start of the new fiscal year. However, an increasing number of these new hires are leaving their jobs within the first month. So prevalent has this trend become that it has spawned a new industry that seeks to address the 'problem'. Now, there are companies (resignation agencies) that take away the burden by acting on behalf of the departing individual (NHK World, Apr 19th 2024). All of this illustrates how complex and diverse careers have become. En masse recruiting is losing popularity among younger generations (The Economist, Mar 27th, 2025).

Post war, the focus was on rebuilding the country. Everyone worked equally hard and would not complain, because such selflessness is what was required and expected then. The emphasis was on keeping one's head down and working diligently for the company, and the company would then, in turn, look after their employees. Progression was primarily based on years of tenure; self-sacrifice was admired over personal gain. Universities were (and still are) a status symbol by which a graduate would be judged and selected, while transcripts were left in archives and few searching questions were asked about what was actually learned. This approach aligned well with the corporate structure, allowing the company to hire and train new recruits from the ground up, effectively instilling the organization's values and culture in them.

The Need for a New Model of Learning

In this new world it is no longer an option for the university years to be treated as a long holiday gifted on the understanding that it will be followed by 40 years of sacrifice to the needs of a single organization. I hope we have shown that an EQ orientation is indispensable if we

are to help equip students for the different challenges that they are likely to face and that, through coaching, this foundation can be built on throughout a necessarily continually evolving career.

The classroom is a safe environment to introduce and develop these skills beginning with the current *Reality* of what a student has become in the context of home and school. Work will be the next stage following university for many students, but we hope that an EQ orientation will have taught them something about who they are and what they want from their careers beyond economic stability and fulfilling the expectations of those who have led them thus far (*their Goals*). Uncertain and even scary as the world outside the classroom may seem there are many exciting *Options* available for those with the ability to see them and the *Willingness* not only to work hard at a job, but also to put effort into finding the field where they can bring the greatest value and achieve their highest satisfaction. With information so readily available and the unstoppable march of AI, could it be that traditional roles of teaching will develop more into coaching in that "coaching is not so much about telling the client about what you know as it is about helping him discover what he already knows, or can find out for himself"? (Marquet, 2015). The more materially complex our IQ obsessed world becomes due to advances in communication technology, data collection, complex problems and so forth, the more we may see uniquely human skills like creativity and EQ move from a footnote on the curriculum pyramid to a more rightful place at its very heart.

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APPENDIX: EQ-Based Classroom Activities

Self-Assessment Cards

It could be said that EQ is the art of noticing, and Timothy Gallwey's Inner Game books describe this well. Gallwey was a professional tennis player and coach who, although trained in Behaviorist psychology, discovered this 'art' while thinking about a more effective way to coach tennis players. "The 'inner game' is based upon certain principles in which an individual uses non-judgmental observations of critical variables". That is to say, "if the observations are accurate, the person's body will adjust and correct automatically to achieve best performance." (Gallwey, 2000). This involves the tracking of work done to promote self-awareness of progress. It is analogous to

tracking one's weight by writing down daily weigh-ins. The weight measured is the critical variable, and focusing on this is likely to lead to weight loss.

Student-Generated Assessment Criteria

This involves eliciting from students what they think distinguishes a high quality assignment; then typing up their input as a list of assessment criteria and having them agree to be graded based on these. This gives students 'skin in the game' of their evaluation and increases the likelihood that they will consciously try to include elements that will raise the quality of their work.

Group Presentations

Group presentations are an effective way to develop EQ skills. From the outset, students will be collaborating with one another in the task of negotiating a topic, deciding roles and peer-reviewing each other's sections. On the day of the presentations, while a group is giving their presentation, the lecturer distributes worksheets to the other students to take notes while listening – this has the added benefit of promoting active listening.

Presentation Practice Days

As discussed above this can have the effect of making students aware of how much work they still need to do to close the gap between where they are at and where they desire to be. In the best cases this will take them from good to great. In the worst cases it will give them a glimpse of their feared future self and jolt them into action.