

## **Cultivating Emotional Intelligence through Social and Emotional Learning: Why It Matters**

Linda Lantieri

Adults and young people throughout the world are living in an extraordinary time in human history. Society and children's life experiences have changed dramatically during the last century to varying degrees and in almost every part of the world. Thanks to modern media and technology, the average world citizen has immediate access to ideas and people from all over the globe. The state of the world economy has shown us how interdependent we all are. What happens in China directly affects what happens in the United States, and vice versa. The global market requires an ability to navigate differences, work effectively in teams, and get along with others by bridging language and cultural barriers. As our planet shrinks, the problems of the environment, health, poverty, economic inequality, nuclear weapons, war, and terrorism all are globally interconnected.

Children growing up today will not just inherit the world's problems. They will be expected to have the skills and the will to help solve them. How will they be prepared to cope successfully with their daily lives and lead us into a complex and uncertain future when a narrow, inadequate vision of education still prevails for so many of the world's children?

Fortunately, there is evidence of a sea change in education worldwide, a new way of thinking about what it means to be not only an educated person, but a "smart person," someone prepared to be an engaged world citizen, a productive worker, and a caring and compassionate friend and family member. The concept of *emotional intelligence* is making its way into the world's consciousness, and a whole new way of thinking about education has emerged.

For close to two decades, there has been a growing awareness of the value of consciously cultivating both adults' and children's emotional and social development. This new awareness recognizes it is essential to nurture our hearts and spirits along with our minds if we are, in Gandhi's words, "to be the change we wish to see in the world." How did the worldwide interest in this other way of being smart enter the public arena, and why should we all pay attention to finding ways to cultivate it in our homes, schools, organizations, communities, workplaces, and in all sectors of society?

When Daniel Goleman wrote *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* in 1995, he presented cutting-edge research on emotional development in a manner that made this research critically important to educators, parents, psychologists, employers, governments, and individuals all over the world. Goleman would be the first to say, however, that he was simply the instrument of bringing these useful ideas forward. He relied heavily on his experience as both a journalist and his background as an academic psychologist as he reviewed and uncovered what some scientists and educators already knew. To inform his writing he looked at the most up-to-date knowledge, theory, and practice in neuroscience, child development, and human intelligence, as well as what the field of education was learning about effective pedagogy.

Until the release of *Emotional Intelligence*, which was quickly translated into many languages, there was little contact between educators like myself who were developing school programs to cultivate social and emotional competence in children and the psychologists and research scientists studying the neurological underpinnings and development of human emotion.

Only as recently as 1990, psychologists Peter Salovey of Yale University and John Mayer of the University of New Hampshire, building on the work of Howard Gardner of Harvard University, coined the term “emotional intelligence.” Salovey and Mayer’s early research on emotional development challenged the popular belief that thinking and feeling are polar opposites. Their work introduced the idea that we might want to consider ways in which the emotions are an intelligence system in and of itself. As they attempted to define and refine the concept of emotional intelligence, they relied on research on the emotions and theories of human intelligence to form the conceptual underpinnings of their new theory. Ultimately they achieved a working definition.

Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

This concept of emotional intelligence focuses on a measurable set of abilities and capacities. When Goleman first wrote about the theory of emotional intelligence based on the available research, he defined Emotional Intelligence (EI) as consisting of five domains: knowing one’s emotions, understanding emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships.

Later he refined his thinking and described EI as the ability to develop competence in four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, Boyatzis 2002).

This initial exploration of the emerging theory of emotional intelligence was followed by several other researchers, psychologists, and educators who offered new approaches and ideas. In 1993, at a meeting hosted by the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, a small group of researchers, educators, and philanthropists under the leadership of Daniel Goleman, Eileen Rockefeller Growald, myself, and others came together to establish the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). It was at one of these early meetings of CASEL that we began to use the words “social and emotional learning” to describe the systematic teaching and learning of social and emotional competencies in a school setting. What all the definitions of EI and SEL have in common is the coordination of cognition, affect, and behavior that include awareness and management of one’s own emotions and awareness and understanding of others’ emotions (Goleman, 2001).

When a new theory is being explored, attempts to refine and clarify it based on available evidence are not unusual. One important outcome of popularizing the cutting-edge research and theory of social and emotional learning has been a worldwide dialogue, especially in the fields of business and education, about the significance of the value added of cultivating social and emotional competencies. As a result, in the process of refining what is already known and collecting concrete evidence related to the theory and practice of emotional intelligence, many discussions have taken place and many hypotheses have been tested.

In the business world, EI has been put to the test through various published studies linking EI and performance in many different work environments. Rosete and Ciarrochi (2005) studied a group of executives who were asked to complete an instrument called the MSCEIT (a personality measure) and the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (a cognitive ability measure). They then asked employees who directly reported to these executives to assess their effectiveness as leaders. They found a significant relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness.

Another important meta-analysis reviewed 69 independent studies (Van Rooy and Viswesvaran, 2004) and explored the influence of EI on performance outcomes in both the workplace and the academic world. The results found a highly significant correlation of .23 between EI and performance. Another study in the United

Kingdom involved 100 managers of Beefeater restaurants and used objective measures instead of supervisor ratings. The results found that managers' scores on the EQ-i® (Emotional Quotient Inventory) tool of measurement predicted both annual profit increase and job satisfaction. The EQ-i® is the first scientifically validated and most widely used Emotional Intelligence assessment in the world (Bar-On, 2004).

Many of the skills that business and government leaders define as essential for effectiveness in the modern workplace—for example, the ability to function as part of a team, work with diverse colleagues and customers, analyze and generate solutions to problems, and persist in the face of challenging setbacks—are social and emotional competencies. The field of education is also exploring the importance of the value added of social and emotional learning and incorporating this research into new approaches to school reform.

In fact, a strong public demand is arising throughout the world today for schools to implement effective educational approaches that promote not only academic success but also enhance health, prevent problem behaviors, and prepare young people better for the world of work and engagement as world citizens. In the United States a 2007 poll of registered voters released by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills reported that 66% believed students need a broader range of skills than just the basics of reading, writing, and math. Eighty percent said the skills that students need today to be prepared for the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are very different from what was needed 20 years ago.

Often called the “missing piece” in school improvement efforts, the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) reflects the growing recognition that healthy social and emotional development advances children's success in school and life. SEL is informed by scholarly research demonstrating that all children can have a school experience that helps them to be not just academically competent but supports them in being engaged life-long learners who are self-aware, caring and connected to others, and active contributors to building a more just, peaceful, productive, and sustainable world.

SEL is the process by which children and even adults develop fundamental skills for success in school and life. SEL teaches the personal and interpersonal skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work effectively and ethically. The field of SEL builds from work in child development, classroom management, prevention of problem behavior, and new knowledge about the role

of the brain in social and cognitive growth. Most SEL programming in schools focuses on five core groups of social and emotional competencies:

- **Self-awareness**—accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
- **Self-management**—regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately.
- **Social awareness**—being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; recognizing and using family, school, and community resources.
- **Relationship skills**—establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing and resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed.
- **Responsible decision-making**—making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; contributing to the well-being of one’s school and community (O’Brien, Resnik, 2009)

There are two primary approaches to promoting social and emotional competency in a school environment. The first is skill development, which requires explicit social and emotional skills instruction provided in a systematic and sequenced way in classrooms spanning all grade levels. This approach is most effective when an evidence-based SEL program is implemented that provides children with the opportunity to be actively involved in their learning, with adequate time for practice, reflection, and reinforcement of specific social and emotional competencies.

The second approach focuses on creating effective learning environments that are safe, respectful, caring, and well-managed. A learning environment that cultivates SEL is characterized by supportive relationships, both student-to-student and also student-to-teacher, with relevant and challenging instructional practices and curriculum. For many educators involved in bringing SEL into schools, this second approach is about changing and managing school environments or climates—in the classrooms, in the hallways, on the playing fields, in clubs, and among all school staff. It is also about developing skills and the conditions that maximize young

people's potential for optimal performance, caring human connection, and relationship effectiveness.

Many of the programs that teach SEL skills have now been rigorously evaluated and found to have significant positive impacts. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a nonprofit organization based in Chicago, has been the leader in research on SEL policy and practice since its founding in 1994. In a systematic analysis of more than 700 studies conducted in the United States by independent researchers on a wide range of SEL programs, CASEL found:

- Compared with students who did not receive SEL programming, students in SEL programs demonstrated enhanced skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors, experienced fewer conduct problems, and had lower levels of emotional distress. They also improved significantly on standardized achievement tests.
- SEL led to gains on standardized achievement tests that ranged from 11-17 percent for different student subgroups.
- SEL programs conducted by classroom teachers, compared with SEL programs taught by researchers who were not part of the regular teaching staff, were just as effective in all the outcome areas studied. The implication is that SEL programs can become a part of the regular school day.
- To yield the greatest benefits, the approach needs to include sequenced instruction, active learning strategies, a focus on developing social-emotional skills, and explicit targeting of specific social-emotional skills (Durlak, Weissberg, 2007; Payton et al., 2008)
- SEL programs were effective across the K-12 grade range and for racially and ethnically diverse students from urban, rural, and suburban settings.

The magnitude of impact and the strength of the research base for SEL are significant. SEL enjoys one of the strongest research bases and delivers among the strongest results of all major educational interventions tested in recent years. In challenging economic times, when cost cuts may require painful teacher layoffs, the payoff for investing in children's social and emotional development is real and sizable. For example, one major multi-year study mentioned above not only found

that by the time they were adults, students who received social and emotional learning in grades 1-6 had an 11 percent higher grade-point average; they also had significantly greater levels of school commitment, attachment, and completion at age 18.

The same research showed that the rate of students required to repeat a grade who received social and emotional learning in grades 1-6 was 14 percent, versus 23 percent of students in a control group. At age 18, students in the same study showed a 30 percent lower incidence of school behavior problems, a 20 percent lower rate of violent delinquency, and a 40 percent lower rate of heavy alcohol use. Clearly, the decision-making and self-mastery skills these students learned early in life paid off greatly as they grew older and encountered life's increasingly complex and challenging choices. (Durlak, Weissberg, 2007)

Further details and information about the research can be found on CASEL's website ([www.CASEL.org](http://www.CASEL.org)), as well as another review of the research literature on SEL that includes studies from a variety of European countries (Fundación Marcelino Botín, 2008).

The hopeful news is that schools, parents, and civil society, working together, can play pivotal roles in supporting adults' and children's healthy development in dealing with emotions and relationships. We now know that SEL skills can be learned and mastered, every bit as much as mathematics or reading can be. When social and emotional skills are taught and mastered, they help children to succeed not only in school but in all avenues of life. The same is true when these skills are cultivated in the workplace.

Imagine a world where:

- The uniqueness, diversity and inherent value of every individual is honored, and education of the whole individual is a basis for a lifelong process in all sectors of society.
- World citizens are able to recognize and manage their emotions, have the ability to resolve conflicts nonviolently, and take an active role in improvement and governance in their communities.
- Leaders in business, government, and civil society shift from a centralized concept of power to democratic approaches that help individuals and groups to self-organize and solve problems cooperatively.

- Pride in one’s country comes as much from collaboration, connection, and engaging each other as world citizens as it does from winning an international soccer game competition.
- A coordinated, well-planned, evidence-based social and emotional learning program in a school is seen not as an “either/or” choice in relation to academic teaching but as a way of enhancing and improving academic performance and overall student success.

Such a world is not out of our reach. More and more schools and workplaces are becoming the norm, not the exception. For example, in Singapore, the Ministry of Education launched a nationwide SEL program in 2006. UNESCO formulated ten basic SEL principles (Elias) in a statement issued in 2002 to ministries in 140 countries (Goleman). The ten basic principles, summarized below, are:

1.	Learning requires caring
2.	Teach everyday life-skills
3.	Link social-emotional instruction to other school services
4.	Use goal-setting to focus instruction
5.	Use varied instructional procedures
6.	Promote community service to build empathy
7.	Involve parents
8.	Build social-emotional skills gradually and systematically
9.	Prepare and support staff well
10.	Evaluate what you do

I have been fortunate to witness firsthand many examples of the integration of social and emotional learning in schools throughout the United States and abroad. Public School 24, also called the Dual-Language School for International Studies (Spanish and English), is one such example. This primary school is located in the heart of a largely Latino (Hispanic), working-class neighborhood in New York City.

Evidence of a child-centered approach to teaching and learning is evident from the moment one enters the school building. PS 24’s walls are covered with colorful children’s artwork. The hallways and classrooms bustle with activity, but there’s a



complete absence of teachers calling for order in loud voices. The lunchroom has plenty of activity and noise, but the children are engaged and mannerly. “Visitors to our school often comment about the warmth and respect students and adults show for each other here,” says Christina Fuentes, the principal (Roderick, 2007).

PS 24 has been implementing a research-based social and emotional learning program since the school opened its doors in 1997. Fuentes explains: “Attending to social and emotional needs is critical. Students need to feel good about themselves in order to learn. If we want them to be risk-takers intellectually, we need to help them feel safe in school and at home. The more we address emotional needs, the fewer discipline problems we’ll have. This is not only right to do morally; it’s a strategy to get kids to achieve academically” (Roderick, 2007).

The children at PS 24 are fortunate to participate in a school program with such an approach, one that is infused throughout the school, where children learn a variety of SEL skills for managing their emotions and resolving conflicts creatively and nonviolently. Adults and children at PS 24 are partners in creating a positive school environment. The children are developing both their leadership skills and skills in social and emotional learning they will use for the rest of their lives—at home, at school, on the street, at work, and as parents and citizens.

As we prepare our children to meet the challenges of living and working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all children deserve the kind of education practiced and modeled at PS 24. Our future depends on it. The world faces challenges in educating its children, but this is also a time of great hope and possibility. The SEL framework, if broadly adopted, would do much to improve educational systems worldwide. We owe it to our children to help them be fully prepared for the challenges and opportunities they are experiencing. I hope that we as citizens of the world care enough about our children to leave our planet a better, safer, fairer, and more compassionate place than it is today. We can no longer ignore what has to be done.

I end with a prayer written recently by Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund:

#### A PRAYER FOR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHILDREN

God, help us not raise a new generation of children  
With high intellectual quotients and low caring and compassion quotients  
With sharp competitive edges but dull cooperative instincts  
With highly developed computer skills but poorly developed consciences

With gigantic commitment to the big “I” but little sense of responsibility to the bigger “we”

With mounds of disconnected and unsynthesized information without a moral context to determine its worth

With more and more knowledge and less and less imagination and appreciation for the magic of life that cannot be quantified or computerized

With more and more worldliness and less and less wonder and awe for the sacred and everyday life.

God, help us raise children who care.

(Edelman, 2008)

### **Biography of Linda Lantieri**

**Linda Lantieri, MA** is a Fulbright Scholar, keynote speaker, and internationally known expert in social and emotional learning. She is also the cofounder of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), which has been implemented at 400 schools in 15 school districts in the United States, with pilot sites in Brazil and Puerto Rico. Started in 1985, RCCP is now one of the largest and longest running research-based (K-8) school programs in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in United States. Linda is also one of the founding board members of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

Linda has over 40 years of experience in education as a former teacher, assistant principal, director of an alternative middle school in East Harlem, and faculty member of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Hunter College in New York City. She is the coauthor of *Waging Peace in Our Schools* (Beacon Press, 1996), editor of *Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers* (Beacon Press, 2001), and author of *Building Emotional Intelligence: Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children* (Sounds True, 2008). She can be reached at [llantieri@worldnet.att.net](mailto:llantieri@worldnet.att.net) or [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org).

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