

Emotional Literacy as a Pedagogical Product

Erica McWilliam and Caroline Hatcher

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Send Correspondence to:

Professor Erica McWilliam
Assistant Dean Research
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology
Victoria Park Rd Kelvin Grove, Australia 4059.
email: e.mcwilliam@qut.edu.au

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Abstract:

This paper examines how emotional literacy works as a 'new humanist' knowledge object, with particular emphasis on its capacity to shape pedagogical processes and their outcomes. It does so in three parts. First, it explores the dimensions of emotional literacy as a knowledge object, showing how the take-up of EQ may be understood to represent the triumph of self-stylisation-as-substance. Second, it indicates how it is located in a larger pedagogical agenda focused on human development and change. Finally, it considers the risks of endorsing and adopting this new knowledge object unproblematically into the work of universities and schools.

What it means to feel emotions is both a contested and an historically contingent idea. As literary critics Peter Cryle and Jane Gallop have pointed out, the idea that 'feeling passionate' is experienced as 'inner fire' or 'in/tensity' is a thoroughly modernist notion, one that has come to displace pre-modernist notions of passion as the product of mastery of a finite, calculated number of bodily postures (Cryle, 1994, Gallop, 1982). Put another way, the premodern idea that *eros* is a product of postural training is a logic that runs precisely counter to the modern common sense that one is mobilised to do erotic things by inner desire – ie, that *the emotions comes first and they arise from somewhere inside the body*.

It is possible, however, that the idea that what we come to feel might be usefully understood as a product of training – physical, moral or ethical – might be making

something of a comeback. While ‘heart/head’ contestation continues, we have been witnessing for some time now the emergence of a ‘new humanist’ proposition that certain passions are available to be learned as practical social skills – that we can learn to feel the right passions for the right reasons.

The idea that the right passions/emotions are important and can be learned as skills arises out of a larger moral climate in which ‘hyper-rationality’ is suspect and advocacy for ‘holistic’ social engagement is strongly endorsed. Whether we blame Descartes or Rousseau for the mind/body split that has been important in informing Enlightenment understandings of social conduct, the fact remains that the idea of a ‘heart/head’ dualism has been a compelling and enduring modernist logic for interrogating what it is that humans feel and how we feel it. Recent theoretical overturning of mind/body or head/heart dualisms, ie, the notion of a “mindful body” (Eagleton, 1990; Leder, 1990; Shilling, 1993) and an “emotional brain” (Le Doux, 1998; Damasio, 2001), have refused separation between what we experience as emotion and how we reason. Far from being oxymoronic, they are emerging as key contributions to contemporary neurological and psycho-social knowledge.

Given that this work has been going on for over a decade, it is hardly surprising that the emotions are now being foregrounded as ripe for recuperation within the rationalising logic of education and management training. One manifestation of this recuperative move is the burgeoning number of programs (formal courses, corporate training, self-help and personal development seminars) in Australia, the UK and USA and Asia that take up the imperative to overturn head/heart distinctions by focusing on ‘emotional literacy’ or ‘emotional intelligence’¹. According to its advocates, emotional literacy (EQ) is “vital in every aspect of life – for successful relationships, for achieving your full potential and for career stardom” (<http://www.practicaleq.com/practitioner.html>). In a recent speech to Stetson University’s graduands, Dr Ranjini Thaver insisted that “studies of students with the same IQ but differential EQs are increasingly demonstrating that those with higher EQs...perform better than those with lower EQs in just about every domain in life” (http://www.stetson.edu/schools/arts_sciences/thaver.html). Thus, where once the emotions were perceived as ‘outside’ the formal academic curriculum, they are now turning up in formal programs of learning both within and outside university programs.

This paper seeks to explore how emotional literacy works as a new humanist knowledge object, with particular emphasis on its capacity to shape pedagogical processes and their outcomes. It will do so in three parts. First, it will explore the dimensions of emotional literacy as a knowledge object. Second, it will indicate how it is located in a larger pedagogical agenda focused on human development and change. Finally, it will consider the risks of endorsing and adopting this new knowledge object unproblematically into the work of universities and schools.

The emotions as literacy

The term ‘emotional literacy’ denotes a call to personal ‘expressiveness’, which is

¹ See for example www.apa.org/monitor/jul98/emot.html; www.connected.org/learn/school.html; www.eiconsortium.org; www.schoolofemotional-literacy.com; www.eqcentre.com.sg

framed as a *social art* in pseudo-academic motivational texts such as *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (Goleman 1996). In this work, clinical psychologist and personality development guru Daniel Goleman directs the individual to the art of expressiveness through interpersonal relationships as the proper means through which to become “more fully human” (p. 45); however the call to *expressiveness* does more than this. Goleman argues that the behaviours through which one *expresses* oneself can be taken as a measure of an individual’s ‘emotional literacy’ (p. 341), and as such they can be evaluated, taught and learned. Moreover, Goleman argues, this measurement (‘EQ’) is a much more reliable measure than intellect (IQ) of an individual child’s future success.

One manifestation of EQ, according to Goleman, is “the degree of emotional rapport” between individuals, and the ability of one individual to orchestrate this rapport when engaging with another. Such an orchestration, if done correctly, produces “synchrony” and this “facilitates the sending and receiving of [proper] moods” (p. 116). Goleman elaborates with reference to the teacher/learner relationship:

The synchrony between teachers and students indicates how much rapport they feel; studies in classrooms show that the closer the movement co-ordination between teacher and student, the more they felt friendly, happy, enthused, interested, and easygoing while interacting. In general the high level of synchrony in an interaction means the people involved like each other. Frank Bernieri, the Oregon State University psychologist who did these studies², told me, “How awkward or comfortable you feel with someone is at some level physical. You have to have compatible timing, to co-ordinate your movements, to feel comfortable. Synchrony reflects the depth of engagement between the partners; if you’re highly engaged, your moods begin to mesh, whether positive or negative. (pp. 116-117)

To understand relationships this way is to understand them as produced by means of precise, learnable social *skills* (eg, a talent for rapport, the ability to delay gratification) which foster and preserve relationships (p. 118) while keeping the individual focused on goals. These skills ought to be observable in the daily interaction of teachers and students if they are part of “communities that care” (p. 279).

Part of the work of pedagogy then is to train individuals in the proper way to be emotional. This training is currently being provided by human resource managers, staff developers and consulting psychologists whose job it is to reinscribe professionals and academic managers as active, enterprising human resources, so that they, in turn, can develop such skills in their students. The call is not to rationality but to *the right sort of irrationality*.

The ‘right sort of irrationality’ is in a sense a secret known only to those who have a high EQ and/or train others towards its development. If we are to accept Foucault’s (1973) point that “knowledge invents the secret” (p.163) ie, that specialised and scarce knowledge hold more power than common knowledge, then it is possible to argue that, in framing the emotions as ‘more intelligent’ than IQ (common intelligence), its

² It is worth noting that the ‘science’ on which Goleman bases his work is almost exclusively psychological studies conducted with middle class anglo populations in the USA.

advocates can claim to be the keepers of secrets. Such knowledge needs training to learn, is experiential, and can be measured in terms of its bountiful presence or sad lack.

Human development and change

The elaboration of any ‘new vision’ of labour and/or intelligence within a business or social enterprise may be expected to entail the denunciation of traditionally accepted current forms of organisation. New wave management theorists of the 1980s (who include Peters and Waterman, 1982; Naisbitt, 1984; Peters, 1989; & Naisbitt & Aburdenne, 1985) shifted the emphasis from bureaucratic to entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial styles of management, ie, “from reactive to proactive” (du Gay, 1991: 47; & Moss Kanter, 1989) engagement. The effect is that schools and universities are now understood to be workplaces where client-driven activity rather than passivity is the norm. This notion of enterprise that floods the *excellence* and *quality* literature is strongly linked to how the individual should act at an ethical level (Gordon, 1991: 48). Individual citizens are constituted as ‘desiring’ the opportunity to participate in this way, thereby realising their ‘true’ selves. Importantly for our argument here, the literature argues for a ‘balance’ of the rational and the emotional. As Peters and Waterman (1982) argue, “we have to stop overdoing things on the rational side” (p. 54). This incitement to disorder is an important step in putting the irrational to work.

It is important to reiterate here that only selected ‘irrationality’ qualifies as worthy of fostering. In “Refashioning a Passionate Manager: Gender at Work” (2003), Caroline Hatcher interrogates the logic through which certain emotions, ie, those which speak of an “open heart” (p.393), have come to be understood as the right sort of emotions for corporate and managerial success. According to Hatcher, the call to take responsibility through connecting emotionally with others “rather than through autonomous action” has been reworked as “the highest moral order” (p.399). ‘Being passionate’ is to be conceived of as desirable, once the right sort of passion has been both understood and mastered.

This shift from ‘head’ to ‘heart’ - and/or the integration of head with heart - has been going on for some time now in the literature of business leadership and management. Since the 1990s, activity, passion, and self-fulfilment have been the idealised hallmarks of all effective workers and this has come to include PhD supervisors, lecturers, university managers, and their ‘clients’. Management guru, Tom Peters (1989), for example, listed eight characteristics of the leader “living” the vision, including “being inspiring” and being a “beacon and control”. He completed the list by insisting that “another part of living the vision is pure emotion” (p. 407). More recently, using an ideal six-category leadership repertoire, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) stress the need for versatility as a leader, arguing as they do that a highly developed ‘emotional intelligence’ is the basis of all effective leadership.

This insistence on blurring the rational/emotional distinction indicates new directions for management knowledge, including the management knowledge that is driving policy in Australian universities. As universities look more like businesses, those hallmarks of excellence in business management ought to be reflected, so the argument goes, in university life. According to Peters and Waterman (1982):

[B]usinesses are full (100 percent) of highly ‘irrational’, (by left brain standards), emotional human beings: people who want desperately to be on winning teams (‘seek transcendence’); individuals who thrive on the camaraderie of an effective small group or unit setting (‘avoid isolation’); creatures who want to be made to feel that they are in at least partial control of their destinies. (p. 60; also cited in Rose, 1991: 115)

The Peters and Waterman analysis overlaps with the multiplicity of gendered binary formulations that have been scrutinised in feminist analyses of social life. These include hard/soft, rational/emotional, independent/nurturing, strategic/spontaneous, and competitive/co-operative (Morgan, 1986: 179) and also controllable/intractable (Calas & Smircich, 1991; Haraway, 1990; Gheradi, 1995; Grosz, 1994). While it could be argued that, in the 1980s, the discourse of feminism and management had maintained a comfortable distance, the mobilisation of this knowledge in the 1990s has produced the possibility of arguing that the soft skills are harder to master than the hard skills such as the technical ones.

Cognitive psychologists, drawing on new developments in neuro-science, have also played a key role in this recuperation of the emotions. Psychologists whose interests are in brain laterality and personality functioning have provided new categorisations of human action. These categories inscribe the shifting boundaries of permissible action for the effective employee. Starting in the 1980s, in this discourse, the ‘affective’ domain, with ‘right-brain’ functioning and emotional responses, became a legitimate part of the organisational worker (Peters & Waterman, 1982: 59-61). The inscription of the right brain/left brain as responsible for “holistic, intuitive, empathetic processes” in contrast with “logical, analytical processes” (Limerick & Cunningham, 1993: 139) provides a certain legitimacy for actions previously framed as outside the professional field, and inappropriate to it. More recently, Daniel Goleman and co-author Richard Boyatzis (See http://ei.haygroup.com/about_ei) have taken this one step further by developing a measurement tool for business schools, the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI-UI). This evaluation tool can help business students target their weakest leadership qualities and work on them, according to Goleman (see Shinn, 2003). When the rationality/emotion binary is reworked as complementary in this way, emotional responses are subsumed *within* a rational framework, rather than remaining the antithesis of rationality.

Refusing any separation of the emotional /logical and the personal /public allows a powerful new source of energy and motivation - and new types of practices – to become both possible and desirable in school or university life as in any other corporate existence. This move achieves a novel linkage between the economic imperatives of the organisation and the personal objectives of the individual. The domain of therapeutic expertise, with its techniques for managing the *happiness* of employees, can and is being mobilised in this framework, as culture, the personal, and the economic are collapsed in a new way. No longer is the facilitation of ‘belonging’ the focus of emotional life, as it was in the 1970s and 1980s through the Human Relations movement. The emotions themselves are quite precisely linked to entrepreneurialism, which, in universities, is being linked in turn with research and/as consultancy as well as quality teaching. Far from being the triumph of style *over* substance, this shift is available to be read as the triumph of self-stylisation *as* substance.

Once ‘proper’ emotions are framed as both laudable and learnable, it becomes possible – indeed necessary – to evoke their importance as appropriate products of formal pedagogical work. A program such as The Emotional Intelligence NPL Practitioner Certification Course in the UK³ insists that its high degree of success in individual capacity building is guaranteed because their program focuses on “the modelling of human excellence”, grounded as it is in “the latest scientific discoveries about the brain and the emotions”. The fact that a higher education institution such as Bristol University offers a Postgraduate Certificate in Emotional Literacy Development attests to the legitimization of ‘the right sort of irrationality’ as a graduate attribute.

Armed with such certification, the graduate is well-placed to performing the emotional labour that being a “self-possessing worker” demands. Adkins and Lury (1999) describe this identity work thus:

Each worker’s ability to enter into an employment contract...implicitly depends upon his or her ability to be self-transforming, self-governing and self-possessing in regard to self-identity, their progress monitored by regular self-appraisal and performance reviews. (p.601)

They make the point that this emotional labour of self-regulation makes it possible for employees to invite increasing intervention in the emotional lives of employees through a range of practices including “therapy, counselling, stress management practices and self-appraisal and performance-review techniques” (p.600), rendering such intervention both normal and natural (p.601-607).

Raising Objections

There is now a growing body of work like that of Adkins and Lury above, which draws attention to the problems associated with the ‘products’ of EQ and the ways in this new literacy has been normalised, naturalised and romanticised. One of the key outcomes of the recuperation of the emotions is the plethora of questions being raised by consultants, professional, doctoral students⁴, magazines and in workplace conversations about whether a manager is ‘passionate’ about what they do. Being passionate has become a normalised way to act – “You cannot be an entrepreneur without passion”; “Organisations and individuals with passion stand out for their dedication, vision, inspiration and achievement” (Bathgate, 2001). This normalisation of passion as critical to effective workers places increased strain on employees to service their clients in fine-grained ways.

A number of critics (eg, Hatcher, 1998, 2003; Townley (1993); Tracy (2000); Shuler & Sypher, (2000); Dewhurst, 1997, Boler, 1999) argue that the idea of emotion as a subset of cognition works to tame alien elements of human being which have proved resistant to the sort of governance that is necessary to the individual as an active and enterprising member of a multinational, globalised workplace. In ‘Capitalising on Emotion: The

³ See <http://www.practicaleq.com/practitioner.html> for an outline of this program.

⁴ Alison Flint has completed a doctoral thesis at the University of Queensland that defines ‘job passion’, and provides an analysis that includes three elements: affective passion, the development of a reliable 18-item scale to assess job passion, and the link between job passion and burnout (Bathgate, 2001).

Taming of the EQ Alien' (1999), Megan Boler argues that the concept of emotional intelligence reappropriates a long-standing feminist terrain of interest in the other-than-cognitive - in what stands outside reason, and does so in ways that are closely aligned with the needs of global capital. She writes:

[P]rofit from human capital relies more and more on an interpersonal dynamic that fuels smooth and efficient production within virtual communities. Isolation is no longer the name of the game. Those individuals most capable of creating friendly and trusting networks for information and gossip are the most valuable workers. The workers of the future are being prepared with curriculum in 'emotional literacy' in hundreds of public schools in the United States.... It is a very short jump from teaching literacy to teaching morals.... We face the seemingly perennial postmodern question: who gets to decide what counts as the good citizen, and specifically the appropriate emotional response? (pp. 16-18)

Boler notes the speed with which the concept of *emotional literacy* has been taken up by the popular media. She draws attention to "the 1995 spectacle of 'EQ' pasted on the cover of *Time* magazine", "the quick sale to Oprah Winfrey and national Public Radio" in the United States, and "the ability of Goleman's book to hold onto its best-seller status for months" (p. 2), as indications that "Western consumers are...hungry for this sudden reversal of a very dominant binary" (p. 2). As Boler sees it, Goleman offers "a popularised rendition of the battle between genes and self-control...claim[ing] new status for emotions as themselves intelligent" (p. 2), and in so doing recuperates potentially 'alien' elements of social interaction. "The hero" of Goleman's thesis, she argues, "is not in fact 'emotion' but the ability to control emotion" (p. 3). It is the display of coolness, of dis/passion, of clear thinking, which characterises the 'emotionally intelligent' individual.

This control of emotion in labouring for the service industries is most explicitly described in manuals of organisations such as call centres and outlets such as MacDonaldis and the Disney enterprises. For example, in her study of valued communication in the workplace, Cameron (2000) describes the intensive training required to welcome customers, and the honing of emotional response to get just the right level of affect in the voice and body (pp.54-55). Similarly, in her study of what she calls 'communication factories', Cameron describes the handbooks, memos, prompt sheets and checklists to discipline their speech, along with training tapes and language laboratories where operators are made to listen to the tone of voice to get their "rapport" right (pp. 91-119). However, as our earlier analysis has demonstrated, this normalisation of the role of affect is not limited to the for-profit service industries. Lecturers, university managers, postgraduate supervisors and their 'clients' have all become subject to this process. The benefits of a service culture in higher education have been elaborated extensively, and the positive benefits, as experienced by students, have been well documented. Performing the 'brand' is now both desirable and natural in the higher education sector.

There is an undeniable irony in the fact that many academics have come to endorse EQ as a graduate attribute, given that, as we have noted elsewhere (McWilliam and Hatcher, 1999), academics are highly suspect in this new version of intelligence. Many of Goleman's examples of the 'social incompetent' are intellectuals of one sort or another. For example:

There was no doubt Cecil was bright, he was a college-trained expert in foreign languages, superb at translating. But there were crucial ways in which he was completely inept. Cecil seemed to lack the simplest social skills. He would muffle a casual conversation over coffee, and fumble when having to pass the time of day: in short, he seemed incapable of the most routine social exchange. Because his lack of social grace was most profound when he was around women, Cecil came to therapy wondering if perhaps he had ‘homosexual tendencies of an underlying nature’. (p. 120)

Goleman names ‘Cecil’ as suffering from a psychological condition called *dyssemia*, a “learning disability in the realm of non-verbal messages”, which “affects about one in ten children”. A teacher/academic in a ‘good’ teaching/learning relationship would be unlikely to be a sufferer. However, those teachers for whom subject expertise or research is all are rendered much more suspect. High intellect is as suspect as eccentricity, when the two are conflated in this way. A teacher’s passion for their disciplinary knowledge could well threaten ‘quality’ relationships by distracting her from the main game. And the main game is not (intellectual) brilliance but “emotional brilliance” (p. 126).

Becoming what Tom Peters has called the “brand of you” (Trinca, 2001, pp.14-15) has its costs. These costs may include burnout as a response to the emotional labour involved in such self-stylisation processes, and these impacts will need further exploration. While the idea of burnout has often been focussed on the individual, the corporatisation of burnout may lead to considerably less buy-in, in the longer term, for academics who currently locate their passion in their discipline. The doctoral study by Flint, cited in this paper, has made a start on this issue. In addition, when self-presentation becomes substance, there are increased difficulties for academic staff in managing the separation of academic judgement and style, or more to the point, academic judgement *as style*. What categories become appropriate for this judgement and how does the examiner understand the mix of rational-to-irrational in determining this judgement?

From another trajectory, emotional literacy is a minefield for all those who make romantic investments in the idea of EQ as a new pathway to achieving opportunity for women. The naturalised model that emotion is the realm of women has come under considerable strain in the emergence of the idea of emotional literacy. It is not that women are denied their place in this move. Rather, the idea is that, through training, everyone can achieve emotional literacy. It is through inclusion, rather than through exclusion, that the reshaping works (Hatcher, 2003). Consequently, the potential of providing a new place for women in already strongly masculinised spaces is likely to be highly contested. As long as male individuals seek the right ‘emotional’ training and develop ‘their feminine side’, their ‘market edge’ remains unsullied.

Equally, the idea that, through greater emotional literacy, power relationships will be better managed is somewhat romantic. Many of the liberal humanist assumptions that underpin communication training (as one common concrete form) act to disempower individuals through the manufacture of emotional literacy. Cameron (2000) alerts readers to the dangers and limits of the move to decontextualise the ‘talking cure’ that takes place in many training sessions. Because communication skills training is often reductive and mechanical, it actually limits our ability to talk interestingly and persuasively. Indeed, much conflict management and negotiation training, for

example, drawing on the underpinning of emotional literacy (described as part of 'relationship management' in Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002) fails to equip participants to develop the capacity for argument and rhetorical skill, and too often focuses on 'win-win', when the innate power relationships make any such egalitarian outcome impossible (Cameron, 2000, pp.162-163). Townley (1993) has similar concerns about the therapeutic processes involved in performance appraisals and other forms of management training, so common now in higher education, as academics seek to transform themselves and their students from a discipline-based to vocationally based and performative model. These mechanisms constitute our identities rather than releasing them from the oppression of being emotional stunted, and in doing so, are themselves new forms of (self) regulation.

Through Human Relations Management and other sources of performative knowledge, academics are being prevailed upon to keep a careful check on their own EQ. A high EQ will have the effect of being influential, and influencing, when it is put to work as a "deep and intimate" dominance which leads to confluence, to synchrony of teacher and learner. As Goleman (1996) argues:

Setting the emotional tone of an interaction is, in a sense, a sign of dominance at a deep and intimate level; it means driving the emotional state of the other person... When it comes to personal encounters, the person who has the most forceful expressivity - or the most power - is typically the one whose emotions entrain the other. .That is what we mean by "He had them in the palm of his hand." Emotional entrainment is at the heart of influence. (p. 117)

Simultaneously, just as traditional academic knowledge becomes less secret, through the increased level of availability of information, decreased costs of access to it, and the democratisation of access to specialists through the new technologies, students, as clients, have equal access to the old sources of power. Foucault (1973, p.163) alerts us to the fact that new specialised knowledge, such as that about emotional intelligence, has more power than knowledge that is common. This invention of emotional competence is available to both academics and students from a variety of sources, and academics are not the holders of this key. A client-based relationship, where academics are a part of the service personnel, also has the potential to lead to abuse and exploitation.

Despite such cautions, EQ, as a new 'secret' knowledge, is now being used enthusiastically in a vast array of organisational settings to filter, differentiate, and decide who is competent and who is not. The new binary formulation, 'the trained' and the 'untrained', whether it be signalled through appropriate language, gesture or emotional response, has the capacity to be just as colonising as the IQ knowledge object has traditionally been. Rather than to signal a democratic imperative of inclusivity, it is also available to be read as one of those reversals of power (Foucault, 1981, p. 101-102) that serves as a linchpin for new forms of regulation. The elevation of EQ as the *best* intelligence is a means of providing all workers with a script for turning themselves into better corporate citizens. The invitation to 'develop your EQ' is an invitation to become more human at the same time that we become more influential. And it is an invitation that we should all feel free to accept or refuse.

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