

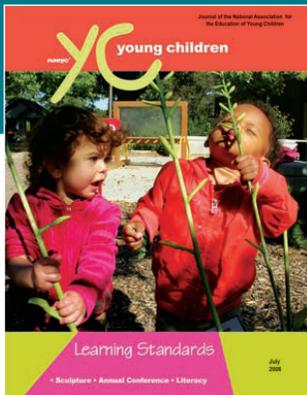
Developmentally
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A reading from the CD accompanying
*Developmentally Appropriate Practice in
Early Childhood Programs Serving Children
from Birth through Age 8, Third Edition.*

READING #4

Are You a Highly Qualified, Emotionally Intelligent Early Childhood Educator?



Janet Pickard Kremenitzer and Regina Miller

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Are You a Highly Qualified, Emotionally Intelligent Early Childhood Educator?

Early childhood educators are a diverse group. Some are veterans, some are new to the field. Some entered the field with a lifelong passion to teach young children, and some came via other careers. Regardless of the pathway to teaching in an early childhood classroom, certain dispositions or attitudes set these educators apart from teachers of older children and adults. Successful early childhood educators need patience

Janet Pickard Kremenitzer, EdD, is an assistant professor and co-coordinator of the Graduate Program of Childhood Education in the Department of Early Childhood and Childhood Education at Lehman College, City University of New York, in the Bronx. Janet.Kremenitzer@lehman.cuny.edu

Regina Miller, PhD, is professor emeritus of early childhood education at the University of Hartford, in West Hartford, Connecticut. For 34 years she prepared undergraduate and graduate students to work with young children in emotionally healthy environments. remiller@hartford.edu



and the ability to observe children, behavior, environments, colleagues, and families and to use what they discover to create an environment that supports children's learning. This article addresses teachers who work with children from pre-K through grade 3.

As teacher educators, the two of us have worked for many years with early childhood student teaching candidates, their cooperating teachers, and other teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators in the urban, suburban, and rural settings in which the students are placed (Kremenitzer & Miller 2003). While supervising and teaching seminars for student teachers, we have gained valuable insight into current practices, ranging from the exemplary to the questionable, and occasionally to the disturbing. We have seen teachers who cross from

one end of the spectrum to the other. The following scenario depicts the optimal teaching environment.

A warm, caring second grade teacher interacts with individual children, making sure that each one feels valued and respected. Classical music plays in the background as the children quietly complete their early morning work. Meanwhile, the teacher asks who is buying lunch and who has returned a permission slip. Several schoolwide announcements are broadcast on the loudspeaker.

After a period of time passes, the teacher stands along one wall and raises his hand, with all five fingers extended upward. The children in this class glance toward the teacher much like musicians in an orchestra who read their music but always have the conductor in their sight. As he slowly lowers his fingers one at a time, children finish their journal entries, return them to their folders, tidy their desks, push in their chairs, and quietly stand behind them to listen to what will come next.

Early childhood teachers need high emotional intelligence to cope with on-the-job stressors and to serve as positive role models for the children in their care.

Emotions are an integral part of a teacher's job and have an impact on teacher effectiveness, behavior, cognition, and motivation (Sutton & Wheatley 2003) as well as on children's behavior (Emmer 1994). Teaching requires emotion-related competence, as it is high in emotional labor (Hochschild 1983). The term *emotional labor* relates to the extent to which a worker must express appropriate emotions to excel in her job. People holding jobs high in emotional labor report high levels of burnout (Bono & Vey 2005), and teachers are among the occupational groups particularly at risk (Jackson, Schwab,

& Schuler 1986). Beginning teachers are extremely vulnerable, and many leave the field because they find children's emotionally charged, problem behaviors difficult to handle (Tye & O'Brien 2002). Because teachers deal with highly emotional situations daily (Maslach & Leiter 1999), having highly developed emotional skills is an absolute necessity.

While strong emotional intelligence is usually taken for granted in someone who chooses to become an early childhood educator, unfortunately this is not always the case. Early childhood teachers need high emotional intelligence to cope with on-the-job

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stressors and to serve as positive role models for the children in their care. Recent brain research points to the role of emotions in all forms of learning and their close relationship to developmentally appropriate practice (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). In our work, we see a strong correlation also between reflective, emotionally intelligent teachers and good classroom management skills.

Background on emotional intelligence

The field of emotional intelligence (EI) is a relatively new and exciting area of study. Peter Salovey and John Mayer coined the term *emotional intelligence* in 1990, and it has since been popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995). It is part of a contemporary view that looks at intelligence as being made up of many abilities, as opposed to the traditional approach to intelligence that focuses on IQ scores. The Salovey and Mayer model is consistent with both Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences model (1993), particularly in the domains of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and Robert Sternberg's successful intelligence model (1996). All three models identify abilities that can be developed through practice, awareness, and training.

Four abilities related to emotional intelligence

The Mayer and Salovey (1997) revised model of emotional intelligence highlights four branches or abilities, including the abilities to

1. perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotions (for example, pick up facial expressions such as frowning);
2. access and/or generate feelings when they help you to think better (for example, breathe deeply, count

Recording Classroom Moments for Later Reference

Self-assessment is never easy. It is helpful to record some classroom episodes that warrant reflection later on due to their impact on the children. Such an episode might involve you, the teacher, regretting your impulsive response to the difficult behavior of a child in the class. Teachers can draw upon these observations when addressing the questions in the self-assessment activities on pages 109–112.

To record classroom moments, jot down some key words at the time that will trigger more detailed responses later; at the end of the teaching day, write more fully about the incident in your emotional intelligence (EI) journal. Or keep a small tape recorder in a pocket and activate it to verbally “jot” observations that you can later develop into more complete thoughts. Regularly recording observations and incidents will become easier and more routine as you begin to experience the value of this practice.

slowly to 10, or walk to another part of the room);

3. understand emotions and emotional knowledge, such as labeling how you feel and using appropriate words to help children label their feelings; and
4. reflect on, manage, and regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (that is, think first—be proactive instead of reactive in the heat of the moment).

Improving preservice students' emotional intelligence by developing these abilities should be an integral component of preservice teacher education programs. In addition, raising or reinforcing teachers' emotional sensitivity can be addressed in ongoing professional development sessions.

Learning to be more sensitive

Looking at each of the four branches individually, teachers can remind themselves about these emotional abilities and work to increase their sensitivity by being conscious of their own and others' emotions in

and outside the classroom. Becoming more sensitive means being hyper-aware of important details, such as changes in a child's life, like illness, a family crisis, or the death of a pet, as one increases in emotional skills (Kremenitzer 2005).

Because early childhood classrooms have more than one adult working with the children, teaching-team members can support each other in learning to perceive emotions accurately, appraise them, and express them. Teachers can give other classroom team members daily feedback by creating times for conferencing,

e-mailing, leaving notes, and developing nonverbal signals. Trust is an important variable when teaching with others in the same classroom. It allows for constructive feedback to better meet the needs of the children in the class.

To increase sensitivity, teachers benefit from creating an EI journal to capture their feelings and experiences (see “Recording Classroom Moments for Later Reference”). Journaling is a very useful tool in learning to help oneself (see Kremenitzer 2005 for a full discussion of the process of journaling).

Using self-assessment to develop emotional intelligence

Teachers can engage in the following self-assessment and then share the results with colleagues from other classrooms. This is not a complete training, but rather it is an activity that can help teachers begin to develop the hyper-awareness so important in increasing emotional skills.

Teaching-team members can support each other in learning to perceive emotions accurately, appraise them, and express them.

Teacher Self-Assessment: How Emotionally Intelligent Am I?

To use this tool, think about yourself in terms of your work with young children. Consult your emotional intelligence (EI) journal and choose examples from your own classroom experiences to illustrate your thoughts. After completing each section of the self-assessment, review the suggestions for moving forward that immediately follow it and engage in one or more. Do this for all four sections. Share and compare your thoughts with a colleague who has a common interest in self-reflection. To maximize your growth, it's important to allot time for ongoing reflection and discussion—and for celebrating success.

Branch One: Perception, Appraisal, and Expression of Emotion

As you ask yourself the following questions, choose a letter from **a** to **i** (from the scale below) that best characterizes your response. Write the letter in the box next to the question, and write briefly about a classroom moment that supports your response.

a **b** **c** **d** **e** **f** **g** **h** **i**
not at all *very little* *sometimes* *often* *all the time*

- Am I able to identify how I am feeling?
- Am I able to identify how the children are feeling?
- Would most people I know consider me to be perceptive about my emotional state and theirs?
- Am I able to notice when the children are angry, sad, bored, and so on?

Suggestions for Moving Forward

How do I begin to increase/enhance my perception of emotions?

1. The ability to perceive emotions requires careful observation of oneself and others. Be sure to pay attention to tone of voice, facial expression, choice of words, and body language. Consult with your teaching partner and help each other become more perceptive about the nuances in your own behavior and in the behavior of the children in the room. To make this happen, teachers can role-play with each other or discuss photographs or video clips that involve more specific behaviors examples.
2. Establish a time each day to reflect alone and with your teaching partner on things that went well and things that could be improved. For example, maybe it becomes clear upon reflection that a teacher's inappropriate emotional response to a situation triggered children's negative reactions. What did you learn from this situation? What can you do the next time such a situation arises? Devise a signal you can share with the other adult(s) in the room to alert them to any inappropriate emotional responses, either adult or child, and to enlist their help in defusing the situation before the negativity escalates and affects the entire class.
3. Visit another classroom to observe how the teachers respond to the children and to each other. Make notes about the positive and negative ways teachers reacted in a few situations. Use them as a reference as you reflect on the activities in your own classroom.

Teacher Self-Assessment: How Emotionally Intelligent Am I? (cont'd)

Branch Two: Emotional Facilitation of Thinking

As you ask yourself the following questions, choose a letter from **a** to **i** (from the scale below) that best characterizes your response. Write the letter in the box next to the question, and write briefly about a classroom moment that supports your response.

a **b** **c** **d** **e** **f** **g** **h** **i**
not at all *very little* *sometimes* *often* *all the time*

- Am I able to identify emotional swings in myself and in others?
- Am I able to delay important decisions if I am in a negative state?
- Am I aware of my emotional state when I try to do creative and interesting projects?
- Am I able to identify optimal times for the children to work on certain projects?

Suggestions for Moving Forward

How can I begin to understand when to intervene and when to go with the flow?

1. Engage in ongoing assessment of classroom activity/energy levels and make appropriate adaptations. As you begin a new day, reflect on the adjustments you made the previous day and continue to implement those changes.
2. When things are going well and everyone is productive, avoid the temptation to add additional activities for the children to accomplish, because they may produce stress and serve as a tipping point. For example, if your primary classroom is a hive of creative and productive activity and you decide to include additional activities, you may find that the children become slow to get their work done and spend more time interacting with their peers in nonproductive ways. Recognize these behaviors as signs that the children have hit their limit and it is time to slow the pace or shift gears to a totally different type of activity, such as something more physical that allows the children to let off steam.
3. Imagine yourself in a challenging situation: you are tired and stressed out, and your supervisor asks for a detailed, written lesson plan for the next few weeks. How do you respond? Knowing your capacity for productivity, do you, for example, produce an inferior plan, ignore the request, tell the supervisor she expects too much, or say you need several days to comply with the request? Identify your trigger points and be realistic about what you can do and do well.

Branch Three: Understanding and Analyzing Emotions

As you ask yourself the following questions, choose a letter from **a** to **i** (from the scale below) that best characterizes your response. Write the letter in the box to the left of the question, and write briefly about a classroom moment that supports your response.

a **b** **c** **d** **e** **f** **g** **h** **i**
not at all *very little* *sometimes* *often* *all the time*

- Am I able to find the right word(s) to express my feelings?
- Am I able to help the children use words appropriately to express both positive and negative feelings?
- Am I able to understand what causes children to feel and behave in certain ways?
- Am I able to remind myself about the stages of child development, and that sometimes a child acts in a more “mature” or “immature” manner, and then do I focus on the whole child, not just the child’s behavior during an isolated event?

Suggestions for Moving Forward

How can I convey my feelings in ways that children will understand?

1. Spend some time in front of a mirror, practicing facial expressions for each of the six basic human emotions: joy, anger, surprise, sadness, disgust, and fear. If possible, photograph each expression so others can accurately name the emotion depicted. Show the photos to someone with whom you are comfortable sharing, and ask the person to name the emotion in each. In your EI journal, write a few notes about this activity. Paste in your six photos.
2. Observe the facial expressions of strangers. You might do this at the food court at a mall or a busy coffee shop—places where people hold conversations. Write down your thoughts about the facial expressions for each of the people you observe. Note what it is about their facial expressions that lead you to think they might be feeling a particular way. Include other cues, such as body language and tone of voice (if audible).
3. List all the synonyms you can think of for each of the six basic human emotions (joy, anger, surprise, sadness, disgust, fear). Put them in order, from least intense to most intense. Alternatively, think about each of the six basic human emotions and draw a symbol or abstract scribble that indicates the level of intensity you tend to feel when you experience each emotion.

Branch Four: Managing Emotions

As you ask yourself the following questions, choose a letter from **a** to **i** (from the scale below) that best characterizes your response. Write the letter in the box next to the question, and write briefly about a classroom moment that supports your response.

a **b** **c** **d** **e** **f** **g** **h** **i**
not at all *very little* *sometimes* *often* *all the time*

- Am I able to move out of a negative feelings state?
- Am I able to stop myself from saying things I will regret later on?
- Am I able to stop obsessing about something that happened?

Suggestions for Moving Forward

How can I reverse a negative behavior pattern and sustain a positive one?

1. Make notes each time something unexpected happens in your class or outside school that catches you off guard and causes you to experience a negative feeling (annoyance, anger, sadness, disgust) when you were feeling either neutral or positive (content or happy, for example).
2. Make a conscious effort to override negative feelings and go back to at least a neutral state, while processing the negative situation for future reference and possibly future action.
3. Make brief notations in your EI journal about your emotions at times when a classroom incident catches you off guard. Use a five-point “smiley-face chart” (a Likert scale with 😊) to express your emotional response, with the intensity levels as follows:

- 1 — very angry or sad 😞
- 2 — angry or annoyed 😐
- 3 — neutral 😐
- 4 — happy or content 😊
- 5 — very happy or ecstatic 😄

[Exercise 3 continued on p. 112]

Teacher Self-Assessment: How Emotionally Intelligent Am I? (cont'd)

At the end of the day, add the details related to each “catching yourself in the moment” event you’ve noted, writing them as journal entries. Describe the unexpected event that moved you toward a negative state. What did you do or think to consciously take charge of your mood so that you did not go to level 1 or 2? If you were not successful in controlling your mood, think about or write about how it felt to be *angry or annoyed* (level 2) or *very angry or sad* (level 1).

Now focus on situations in the classroom where you find that you are engaged for periods of time working in the positive states of *happy or content* (level 4) or *very happy or ecstatic* (level 5). Reflect on what brought you to this positive emotional state. How long did you sustain this positive state, and what do you attribute this to? Describe what the children in the class were doing that helped contribute to the state.

Conclusion

Children’s experiences during the early childhood years are the foundation for all future learning. Social and emotional skill development has always been a key component of early childhood programs. For well-trained early childhood teachers to have strong skills in scaffolding and nurturing emotional intelligence abilities in young children, it is important that they consider their own emotional intelligence. The activities in this article can help develop emotional intelligence and hopefully provide a common language teachers and children can share.

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Make Your Classroom an Emotionally Intelligent Environment

To help make your classroom a positive place, we recommend using the following proactive attitudes and activities:

- Hold positive and high expectations for all children (all children can and will learn).
- Have high regard, a caring attitude, and respect for all children and their efforts.
- Lead the class in developing a charter of acceptable behaviors that address (a) the teacher’s right to teach, (b) the children’s right to learn, (c) the children’s psychological and physical safety, and (d) property. In some settings, a schoolwide charter links all classrooms in these behaviors.
- Implement clearly defined and rehearsed routines and procedures; for example, establish opening routines for entering the classroom, taking attendance, and getting the day started.
- Hold a class meeting every morning. Make it a time and place to infuse feeling words and share other aspects of emotional intelligence branches with children.
- Create teaching routines such as large and small group configurations, paired arrangements (think pair-share), conversations during group work, and completing an activity early.
- Create closing routines for finishing an activity, cleaning up, leaving the classroom, and so on.

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