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How long have you need involved in Emotional Intelligence or working with Aristotle EI?

I have been connected with Aristotle EI since its origins. My work with the Department of Education opened collaborative opportunities to bring Aristotle EI's evidence-based EI development programs into school curriculum. It was really ambitious for its time, as schools' knowledge of social emotional theory was incredibly limited, and misunderstood. There were some ground-breaking moments in bringing this research into educational networks, working closely with executive leaders who were courageous in opening their communities to new skills that we now know are a neurobiochemical imperative to human life and survival.

How do you use EI in your work?

Emotions drive my life. I feel before I think. This means that I am finely tuned into a constant stream of information that comes from both my internal state, and also the state of others. That's a lot of data, especially when emotions occur in

micro moments and are constantly shifting and co-existing with other emotions. It sounds exhausting, but in fact it's exhilarating to be so close to life's energies. This means that my work with clients, with teams and with organisations is driven by this energy field of feelings. A space is created in my work where this energy field is welcomed, valued and respected. Words are then invited, and conversations of experience, depth and memory allow people to be held in care and to be seen. When emotions are acknowledged, then those who hold those emotions are validated. Under these conditions, empathy is cultivated and communities of care are created. Prosocial behaviours extend the quantity and quality of our lives. At Salutogenics, we aim to simply support people to be better versions of themselves.

What are the current challenges for schools, teachers, parents, children and adolescents in mental health, resilience, or emotional intelligence?



The mental health of people within school communities are challenged by a number of variables, like exposure to a history of compromise growing up, secure relationships and connections as a child, poverty, trauma, abuse, self worth, and anxiety just to name a few. The development of good mental health requires adults to teach, lead and model this learning. Given that anxiety is currently the highest mental health issue in our society, it stands to reason that those who lead our school communities, are equally as impacted by the symptoms that debilitate capacity to function well. That we mandate the teaching and learning of social emotional competencies with students, and bypass the wellbeing of the teachers to teach this content, we ignore the burden of disease that impacts the quality of this teaching. Teachers may not have the resources to hold this content with confidence, if they, themselves, are feeling vulnerable. Working with school staff should be a first priority.

The additional challenge is that parents are also finding themselves in positions of emotional vulnerability; some are aware of their positions and others are not. As a parent, it is confronting for your child to be learning and adopting behaviours that

challenges the current authority of the home. For example, a household that does not discuss emotion, which is then invited to participate in homework that involves the use of emotional literacy, will most probably be dismissed and undervalued. The child may then be less likely to engage with this content at school, and in fact, may only serve to increase internal turmoil for that student. Therefore, the important inclusion is to onboard parents so that the learning is supported from a holistic perspective to truly embed this foundational skill set. Finally, it needs to be fun and relevant for the students, otherwise they disengage, and little difference will be made to the improvement of quality of life.

In your opinion what is the most compelling reason why we should develop emotional intelligence in schools?

Explicit teaching of EI increases adaptive outcomes for kids by supporting higher order thinking, as well as levels of maturity, moral development and coping responses. Human life is an emotional life; feelings are experienced along an entire range of volume, from blaring loud to an



almost silent whisper. Emotions are a biological imperative. If we are not feeling, we wouldn't be alive. Given the vital role they play in our lives, then the greater our capacity to work with this type of internal data, the greater our ability to make better choices in responding to the demands of our environment.

Why do you think that EI is important in schools?

We have an obligation to teach Emotional Fitness. Physical fitness is the movement and strengthening of our muscular system so that it allows us flexibility and broad stretch to be strong and engage fully with our physical environment. Emotional fitness is the movement of our brain with *feeling* words and conversations that move our thinking with flexibility and build cognitive strength, to hold more complex information and enable more creative and divergent outcomes. Creating great thinkers in our students is to teach the crucial link between thinking and feeling, to strengthen the neural circuits within the brain's wiring.

It then enables relationships to be developed with care. EI is protective against bullying, promotes positive conflict

development and preserves integrity of our inner self so that we are less likely to move to shame. EI advocates for our wellbeing and the wellbeing of others.

Should we measure emotional intelligence in schools?

Yes. Measuring these competencies not only allow the tracking of progress, but also monitor the area of development, so that these foundational life skills are given the best opportunity to grow.

Have you noticed any changes in mental health or emotional intelligence in schools?

At the moment, mental health is on everyone's lips within the educational community. The pandemic has certainly placed the spotlight on the spectrum of emotional states, in particular the levels of dysregulation experienced during remote learning, as well as within the home environment. There is so much work to be done in this area. People need to reset their levels of coping, by being offered the tools on managing protracted uncertainty. Building resilience through emotional improvement is key.



How do we convince governments and schools to invest more money and time in developing emotional intelligence?

Hard data is what convinces government, which is why measuring EI in schools is crucial. Unless explicit numbers begin to show the story between EI and academic success and increased adaptive behaviours, then schools will not have the evidence required to advocate for this learning.

We also need more collaborative work. Local businesses would be ideal to become involved as well as local councils so that emotional health is marketed more broadly and is seen as familiar projects. Exposure is important to bring the myths of emotions out of hiding.

Do you have any other thoughts about EI and school education, society, and the future?

We are building the children of tomorrow and it's not enough to move through the motions of current educational curriculums. I find it interesting that education can produce clever kids, but why is it not producing pioneers of ideas? Anxiety and depression blocks expansive ideologies for advanced societies. Empathy and broadened pleasant emotion opens the mind to neurological activations that promote the advancement of human health.

