Focus on Students

SELF-AWARENESS & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS PREDICTORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

BY CAROLYN HAWES, BSN PROGRAM

Students new to college life are faced with the excitement of pursuing higher education, acquiring new knowledge, and the hope of reaching their goals successfully. Considerations for the challenges that arise academically, socially, and emotionally are met with varying levels of human ability. These challenges include learning how to study effectively, managing time to meet assignment deadlines, navigating through group processes when working with peers in assignments, or just coping with the rigors of the new role. A student may not consider the degree of self-awareness and emotional intelligence necessary to recognize these challenges and to take action to overcome them, in order to succeed in an academic environment.

Self-awareness is “the means by which a person gains knowledge and understanding of all aspects of self-concept” (Newman, 2007, p. 88). It refers to the relationship between how others see us, how accurately we see ourselves, and the ability to express who we think we are through language (Beebe, Beebe, Redmond, & Geerinck, 2010). When our objective self-assessment is congruent with how others see us, we are considered to have a healthy level of self-awareness (Kozier et al., 2010). A high level of self-awareness, a component of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998), can be the difference between success or failure in one’s academic pursuit.

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability of a student to understand feelings, the ability to discriminate between them, and to use the knowledge of the feelings to guide behavior (Beebe et al., 2010). There is evidence that people who can manage their feelings well are more likely to be effective in their lives (Goleman, 1995). Expressions of feeling are influenced by culture, social development, and personal characteristics; when emotional skills have been nurtured and developed in families, students are more likely to be effective in their lives (Doane & Varcoe, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Newman, 2007). A person with a high EI can regulate her moods, successfully navigate self socially, empathize authentically, adapt well to stress, and motivate self to stay focused despite significant distractions (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 1998; Rosenberg, 2003). Emotional intelligence level can influence one’s success (or failure) in an academic environment regardless of the person’s academic intelligence (IQ).

The average person often mistakes IQ and EI! A person with a high IQ can often achieve success with or without a high EI; however, other challenges may arise for these students (Goleman, 1995). Students with low EI may have difficulty with motivation, handling frustrations, or delaying gratification when deadlines are looming; these same people may struggle with understanding their role in interpersonal relationships or group assignments (Goleman, 1995). Studies have shown that IQ contributes only about 20% to the factors that determine life success; this finding reveals that high IQ alone is not the only predictor of success (Goleman, 1995). An average student academically with a high EI recognizes her ability (or limitations) and uses multiple strategies to succeed (Goleman, 1995). This same high EI student is in touch with her emotions, recognizes personal stress levels, and can rationally navigate self through these feelings and stress levels (Goleman, 1995); this student can persist in her academic quest when others may not (Goleman, 1995).

Emotions and self-awareness, components of emotional intelligence, are therefore integral to the academic or life success for students (Goleman, 1995). When a person is aware of self, bodily, emotionally, and cognitively, she can sense what is occurring to her and others, navigate their way through the challenging situation using multiple strategies (Doane and Varcoe, 2005), and provide a space for academic success to occur.

References
JOY AS PEDAGOGICAL EXCLAMATION MARKS

By Kevin McPherson, Department of English

To beg in, a dirt sentiment: I was planning to build this brief article upon well-tamped research on pedagogy + joy. Finding scarce research on this topic, this article has mutated into a confession of my own teacherly jumping and bumping.

What is? Dictionaries are word graveyards. Define your own joy. Choosing euphoria, seeking wonder, exhibiting gratitude, embracing mystery: sometimes the map, itself, is treasure enough. Joy is a vivid mind-heart substance that moves like osmosis from cell to cell.

How to? Just like the gaseous concepts of our world find solid form in words, joy manifests itself physically, too. In literature and creative writing classes, I regularly encourage co-learners to teach me the ways that the form of a text communicates. For instance, the following two sentences convey the same action: "The dog steps through the wet yard" and "A dog walks through the wet yard." Two sentences convey the same action: "The dog steps through the wet yard" and "A dog walks through the wet yard." For me, this sometimes means using my body as an exclamation mark: flung-curtain eyes, bed-spring feet, dessert-hungry ears, pinwheel-smile reactions to student participation. Even if occasionally exaggerated, such evidence of unabashed passion creates the contagion of joy in the classroom. Other times, performing joy means self-jesting, being awkward, and acknowledging my own typos or wrong guesses so that students know incorrectness is part of the learning process. Other times, it means bringing to class a $2 bag of jujubes for sharing participation taste-sensation exclamation marks!

In reading and writing, I experience joyful moments when discovering how words or forms suggest one more revel-elations. It equals a celebration of potentials! Facilitating these moments of joy in the learners' experiences of a reading + writing means allowing them to approach a text in a wobbly/free/prepared—not prescribed—manner. And this openness to meaning (joy) requires the celebration of wrongness as an inevitable possibility, as a natural consequence of the risk of connecting meaningfully with a text. "Letters from friends / joy of speech / each moment shared with someone / melting snow" (bpNichol)

The why? James G. Henderson reminds us that John Dewey found that constructive learning is a tentative process. Joy helps mitigate this tension. In What the Best College Teachers Do, Ken Bain reminds us that learning means vitality. Joy is one of the essential nutrients in the breakfast cereal of learning vitality! In my courses, learning functions as a moment shared with someone, and this sharing requires language, time, and attentiveness. To really zap, this attentiveness might require a kind of full-heartedness that relies on such conductors as trust and compassion, awe and respect, generosity and joy: these are the electrons of meaningful relationships, which are the electrons of meaningful teaching.

References

METACOGNITION & SELF-REGULATION LEADING STUDENTS TO BECOMING AUTONOMOUS LEARNERS

By Charlotte Jones, Modern Languages, Spanish

As a language educator, my aim is to help students develop the language skills they need in order to achieve linguistic and communicative objectives. While that seems straightforward, there are many factors at play for adult foreign language learners who often feel uncertain or anxious as they begin learning a foreign language. So the challenge is to discover approaches that will aid them in becoming more confident, efficient and effective language learners. This was where my exploration of the concepts of strategies in-
METACOGNITION & SELF-REGULATION CONT’D
BY CHARLOTTE JONES, MODERN LANGUAGES, SPANISH

into groups of three or four to briefly share their responses. Following that, each group reported back, and I wrote students’ ideas on the board. The entire activity took about twenty minutes, but it had initiated the consciousness-raising and reflection process that is at the core of metacognition and which could be applied to future learning tasks.

Many of the activities in the language classroom are task-based, which is particularly supportive of the development of metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy. The process of reflecting on what a task requires, how best to approach it before actually doing it, offers a couple of benefits. For learners who feel anxious, it allows them to focus on the learning task, distance themselves from the anxiety, and take more control of their learning process. For learners who feel more confident, they can draw on their repertoire of strategies to improve and enhance their learning experience. Post-task reflections complete the cycle of metacognitive awareness and self-regulation and encourage the learners to further enhance their learning experiences. These might be directed to any one of the five intersecting components of metacognition: preparing and planning for learning, selecting and using strategies, monitoring learning, orchestrating strategies and evaluating learning (Anderson, 2008).

Although my own personal research has been directed to metacognition in language learning and teaching, my research has led me to many studies on metacognition as it applies to other disciplines. One book that I found useful as a starting point is the Handbook of Metacognition in Education listed below.

References

USING STUDENT DATA TO INFORM TEACHING AND LEARNING
BY JAN O’BRIEN, MANAGER, INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

What does Okanagan College know about its students? A lot, actually. What do these data say about our students and how they progress through their educational pathways?

We start with people as prospects, those that inquire about courses and programs at the College. The Recruiters, Advisors, and others help them transition from being prospects, to applicants, to enrolled students, storing communications information in the Banner Relationship Management (BRM) module. Once people are applicants, we track their progress in Banner by the decision codes on their applications, to see where they are in the process and where some of them have stopped. Deans use application data to see if there are any issues to be resolved. The Registrar’s Office and Student Services use the application information in BRM to advise students on fee payment deadlines, course registration, financial awards they may be eligible for, wait-listed seats that have become available, and more. Once applicants have enrolled, they are students; we now have enrolment and grade data on their courses. We know if they are on academic probation, and we can intervene with students that are struggling.

How do we know if things are working well? Deans conduct a Tier I program review on every program, every year. Also, we have feedback from many institutional surveys. We ask students their opinions of programs, facilities, services, and campus life in the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS). We conduct the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) on alternating years. These surveys tell us what is operating well and what we need to work on. The survey results are reported to the Board of Governors and reported in myOkanagan for staff to read. As well, we conduct an institutional survey on Aboriginal Access and Services to get feedback from Aboriginal students. The College conducts evaluations of teaching and distance education tutoring. Lastly, the College conducts several smaller surveys on special topics as the needs arise.

When students transfer or graduate we get their feedback through the Student Outcomes surveys, a provincial initiative that surveys all graduates from provincial post-secondary institutions. Results for these surveys are on the College’s Institutional Research website as well as on the BC Student Outcomes site. BC Stats oversees the project. You can see not only results for Okanagan College’s programs but for all of the BC institutions’ programs. These data are used for program review.

Lastly, as students work through the education system from K12 to post-secondary,
USING STUDENT DATA, CONT’D

The affective domain is essential for learning chemistry, but it is the least studied, most often overlooked, most intangible, and hardest to evaluate of Bloom’s three domains (Koballa, 2008). Reasons for this imbalance include the challenge to observe and measure affective objectives and the traditional separation between the affective and cognitive domains. The cognitive domain is believed by scientists to be more reason-driven and objective. Successful students in science are associated with possessing sound values, genuine interest, positive attitudes, and appreciation for the subject (Garritz, 2010). Scientific attitudes have come to be known as ways in which scientists believe in, and conduct, their work. Appreciation for science is seen as an enthusiasm to work on problems that have elements of authenticity while becoming involved in cooperative interactions. Researchers often ignore that motivation, the internal state that arouses, directs, and sustains behavior, is crucial to success in chemistry (Brooks, 1993). I believe the ultimate goal of investigation into the affective domain would be to stimulate joy, wonder, satisfaction, and delight in students as a result of their encounters with chemistry; the affective dimension is not just a catalyst but a necessary condition for learning to occur.

Students may experience affective roadblocks to learning that can neither be recognized nor solved when using a purely cognitive approach in the study of chemistry. I suggest teaching the affective objectives of the chemistry curriculum so students will develop an appreciation of chemistry and find its practical relevance in their daily lives. Students do focus on instructor attitude and classroom atmosphere. Instructors need to show students respect by conveying a genuine interest in student learning by being available for students, offering clear instructional goals, and expressing acknowledgment that certain tasks in chemistry may be difficult. The chemistry learning experience would be more deeply ingrained if the science were taught to develop both intellectual abilities and activities and to motivate to learn at the same time (Tan, Goh, & Chia, 2006).

I offer the possibility of utilizing bridging strategies. Open-ended projects and labs in an active and creative environment are helpful. Research has begun to show that these kinds of efforts lead to community building, increased motivation, reduction in alienation and anonymity, improved team skills, active participation in the learning process, with increased comprehension and accomplishment (Cooper, 2005). In my teaching practice I observe many difficulties in bridging the cognitive-affective gap; for instance, teaching the basic procedures for writing formulas is a fairly straightforward procedure, yet establishing the relationship to everyday life experiences is often more complex. I propose that acceptable science-related behavioral goals encompass use of methods and tools of chemistry to address out-of-college problems, chemical applications to solve global problems, and ethical use of chemical research maximizing the likelihood that all students will be prepared to become active participants in the scientific enterprise. Using techniques involving creativity, improvisation, and use of intuition may aid the process.

References

Student engagement enhances both learning and teaching experiences, and quite simply makes education more fun. Since initially introduced by Alfie Kohn (Kohn, 1993), there has been increasing interest in student engagement (SE) throughout educational literature over the last twenty years. Furthermore, increasing student engagement has been identified as a Key Direction at Okanagan College, and measures such as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement have been implemented.

I recently had the opportunity to attend an inspiring International Conference on Teaching and Learning with the specific intent of learning more on the subject of student engagement. Since returning, I have become very interested in researching and incorporating new SE ideas into my classroom. What I have realized is that student engagement is multi-dimensional, and occurs at cognitive, behavioural, and emotional levels. Strategies to increase SE are many; however, having a passion about the subject you are teaching and fostering genuine relationships with your students is critical. Student engagement recognizes every student as a capable adult learner with unique individual background knowledge and strengths to contribute, and encourages a positive climate of cooperative learning.

As students near the end of term, they get tired and understandably focus on being successful on the final exam. Offering extra review sessions seems to help calm some anxiety, but the students’ focus is often on what to study specifically for the exam, rather than identifying their own learning needs. This year, to attempt to change the tone of the review session, I handed out a small sheet of colored paper to each student in class and encouraged all interested students to attend an upcoming review session. I mentioned, however, that the “price of admission” was to write down one or two specific questions they had on course content. When students arrived, I passed around a fedora bought at Value Village and systematically drew the questions from this hat. What I noticed was the strong sense of engagement the students had in this process. There was visible excitement when their question was pulled. Students were actively listening in the class and all students felt they had an opportunity to have their questions answered. Student feedback on this review class was very positive and I intend to continue this method in the future.

A second outcome of my interest in SE strategies was to look at the end-of-course evaluation I was using to better reflect outcome measures of engagement. Five levels of SE have been commonly noted in the literature: academic, cognitive, behavioral, psychological and social domains. After an initial review of several measures of student engagement, I modified my current course evaluation to include questions based on the domains identified in the literature to promote SE, such as: 1) a supportive learning environment, 2) recognition of individual learning needs and learning styles, 3) availability and support from the instructor, 4) clear performance expectations, and 5) sufficient academic challenge. I have trialed this modified course evaluation in a lecture and a lab course to date and generally feel the new evaluation form better reflects the learning experience of the student. Overall, I feel that exploring new strategies to increase student engagement is an exciting and meaningful goal. Our students deserve the best learning experience possible. For your information, a detailed literature review on Student Engagement (2011) has been published by the University of Alberta and is an excellent resource.

Notes

References

MEET THE NEW ILT FELLOWS

Heather Brown

Heather has been employed at Okanagan College for the past 16 years, with the last 10 years in the Admissions Office. While working full-time, Heather returned to university to complete her education. In 2010 Heather received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from UBC-Okanagan. She is now in the final stages (thesis defense) of her Master of Arts degree (Interdisciplinary Studies) at UBC-Okanagan. In 2011, Heather successfully completed the Learner-Centred Instructor Certificate (LCIC) offered through Okanagan College and she plans to complete the Provincial Instructor Diploma. Early in 2012 Heather joined the OC Toastmasters and strongly encourages all staff to become involved. Heather is a new Fellow, representing the Non-Instructional Support Staff, with The Institute for Learning and Teaching and is looking forward to working alongside the other Fellows as well as being involved with the Lunch and Learn Series. If you have ideas or suggestions please contact Heather by email at hcbrown@okanagan.bc.ca

Stephen O’Loughlin

Stephen joined Okanagan College in the summer of 2012 as an instructor in the Electronic Engineering Technology program. Prior to working at the College, he was living in Belgium, and working as a design engineer at IMEC, a leading European research centre for nanotechnology. Stephen grew up in Ontario and studied electrical engineering at the University of Toronto, where he received a Master’s degree in Photonics in 2004. As a new member of the faculty, he is excited to help contribute to the growth and development of the students at OC. He is also the new ILT Fellow for Science and Technology. Stephen can be reached at SOLoughlin@okanagan.bc.ca.

Rob Kjarsgaard

Rob is very passionate about the ILT and enhancing learning and teaching at Okanagan College. He became the founding Program Coordinator in 2009 when the ILT was formally established. Currently Rob is serving as the ILT Fellow for the Shuswap-Revelstoke region. Rob can be reached at rkjarsgaard@okanagan.bc.ca.

LEARNER-CENTRED INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

A transfer agreement between Okanagan College and Vancouver Community College is now in place for courses in the Learner-Centred Instructor Certificate program. Graduates of Okanagan College’s LCIC program will receive transfer credit for two courses in the Provincial Instructor Diploma program: PIDP3220 — Delivery of Instruction, plus one of PIDP3250 — Instructional Strategies or PIDP3260 — Professional Practice. This translates to a cost savings of over $900 in professional development funds for individuals who need or want to complete the PID program.

Interested in finding out how you can improve your techniques to become a Learner-Centred Instructor? Go to http://ilt.okanagan.bc.ca for a program description and admission requirements. Excellence in learning and teaching are key objectives of Okanagan College; as a result, the $932 tuition can be waived for all OC staff with the completion of a fee waiver found in My Okanagan, Employees, Forms, Continuing Studies: http://www.okanagan.bc.ca/Asset7269.aspx. Registrants will be required to purchase two course textbooks and pay a small administration fee. For more information or to be put on a contact list, please email Paul Stephenson at pstephenson@okanagan.bc.ca.