

How reading improves a child's emotional intelligence

By Irene Helen Zundel, adapted from <http://www.partnershipforlearning.org>

For decades, schools have tried to predict which students would do well both in higher education and in the work place. The tools they used to make their best guess were standardized achievement tests and IQ scores.

Recent studies indicate there may be a better predictor--**the measurement of a child's emotional intelligence**. Experts believe that success is influenced 20 percent by IQ and 80 percent by various factors that make up a person's character and personality, or their "emotional intelligence." Furthermore, they have found that emotional intelligence can be learned, and reading can help develop it.

What is emotional intelligence? According to Harvard Psychologist Daniel Goleman, emotional intelligence is a combination of five characteristics:

- ❖ **self-awareness**-the ability to recognize and identify a feeling
- ❖ **managing one's emotions**-handling fear, anxiety, anger, sadness and worry in an appropriate and proportional way
- ❖ **self-motivation**-involves emotional control, the ability to delay gratification, and the ability to keep working toward a goal, expecting success
- ❖ **empathy**-recognition of and sensitivity to the emotions of others
- ❖ **handling relationships**-learning to handle conflict constructively and getting along well with others

Why is emotional intelligence important? Two noted studies show the importance of emotional intelligence.

In one study, called the "marshmallow test," a group of four-year-olds were offered a marshmallow and told that if they delayed eating it, they would receive a second one as a reward. The progress of the children was monitored for many years afterward. Researchers found that the children who **delayed gratification** and earned a second marshmallow were more successful in life. As high school seniors, they scored an average of 210 points higher on their SATs and had better overall grades. They also were more skilled at handling frustration and had more determination to overcome obstacles in pursuit of a goal.



A second study conducted by neuropsychologist Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania in 1984 found **an optimistic outlook is a better Predictor of academic success than IQ, SAT scores or grades.** Optimists handle frustration better and tend to be resilient in the face of opposition. They meet the challenges of work with a persevering attitude. Luckily, the study indicated that even people who are by nature pessimistic could learn optimism.

How does reading improve emotional intelligence?

Books expose children to a variety of people, attitudes and experiences that mirror real life. They help them understand what others think and feel and do every day. In learning to identify the emotions of characters in stories, they begin to understand their own feelings and the emotions of others as well.

Reading gives children words with which to express themselves. Children who can state what they feel are less inclined to act out, become depressed, or express their feelings through bodily symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches.

Stories often show positive and negative behaviors, conflicts, dilemmas and the resolution of problems in relationships. They give children strategies to work out similar issues in their own lives.

Books can inspire and teach by example. Stories of famous people and heroes can illustrate positive qualities such as perseverance, hard work, and determination to overcome obstacles. Having a role model often motivates children to set goals and succeed at achieving them.

Early reading experiences can pave the way for children to learn to cope with emotions and to develop skill in interpersonal relationships. That foundation will aid them in succeeding in school and work later in life.

Recommended books

[Emotional Intelligence](#), by Daniel Goleman. Bantam Books, 1997.

[How Are You Peeling? Foods with Moods](#), by Saxton Freymann, Joost Effers Arthur A. Levine, 1999. Reading level: Ages 4-8

[The Brand New Kid](#), by Katie Couric, Marjorie Freeman, Doubleday, 2000. Reading level: Ages 4-8.

[Today I Feel Silly: And Other Moods That Make My Day](#) by Jamie Lee Curtis, Laura Cornell. Harpercollins Juvenile Books, 1998. Reading level: Ages 4-8