

Section 4: Developing emotional intelligence and self-reflection

What is Emotional Intelligence (EQ)?

Emotional Intelligence, commonly referred to as EQ, is the ability to recognise, understand and manage your own emotions, as well as the emotions of others.

EQ includes empathy, self-regulation, motivation and social skills.

EQ is a critical skill in adult education, enabling educators to build trust, navigate group dynamics and respond with empathy.

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Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (1)

Daniel Goleman, a psychologist and science journalist, popularised the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in the 1990s. His model outlines five key components that influence how we understand and manage emotions — both our own and those of others.

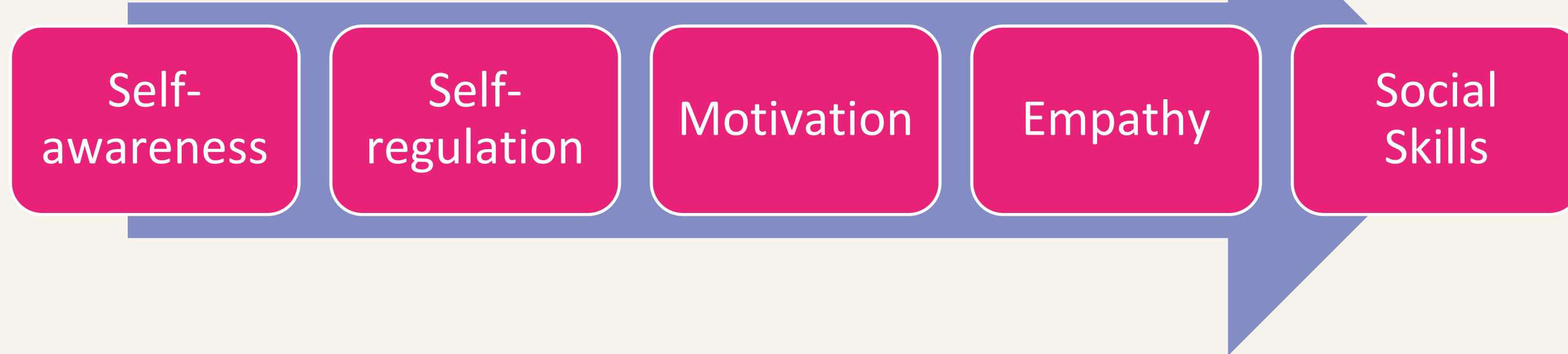
Goleman argues that these emotional competences are just as important as cognitive intelligence for success in personal, professional and educational contexts.

In teaching and learning, emotional intelligence enables stronger relationships, greater empathy and a safer, more inclusive classroom environment.

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Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (2)

Goleman's EQ Theory centres on the following core competences:



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Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (3)

Self-awareness is the foundation of emotional intelligence.

This competence deals with being able to accurately recognise and understand your own emotions, triggers and habits.

In an educational setting, self-aware educators are better equipped to respond thoughtfully, rather than react impulsively, particularly when faced with stress or conflict.

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Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (4)

Self-regulation is the ability to manage your emotional responses in healthy and constructive ways.

It includes staying calm under pressure, adapting to change and expressing emotions appropriately.

For educators, this skill helps to maintain a positive and stable learning environment, even when challenges arise.

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Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (5)

Motivation refers to the drive to pursue goals with energy, persistence and a sense of purpose — even in the face of setbacks.

Educators with high emotional intelligence tend to be self-motivated and model resilience, enthusiasm and optimism, which can inspire learners and promote a growth mindset.

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Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (6)

Empathy is the capacity to understand the emotions and perspectives of others.

It goes beyond sympathy and involves active listening and cultural sensitivity.

In diverse adult learning environments, empathy allows educators to respond respectfully to the lived experiences of learners, especially those facing additional barriers.

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Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (7)

Social skills includes the ability to build positive relationships, communicate clearly, manage conflict and work well in teams.

For educators, strong social skills enable collaboration with colleagues and learners, resolve misunderstandings constructively and promote a respectful, inclusive classroom culture.

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EQ in the adult learning classroom

Educators with high EQ are more responsive, less reactive and better able to manage group dynamics.

They listen actively, de-escalate tensions and show compassion, which increases trust and engagement – especially among diverse groups of adult learners, who may bring their own personal struggles, trauma and anxiety to the classroom.

Practicing EQ is central to adopting a trauma-informed practice to your teaching.

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Reflecting on your own attitudes

Educators should regularly reflect on their assumptions, triggers and biases.

Consider questions such as:

- How do I respond to emotional behaviour in class?
- Do I show more empathy to some learners than others?

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Encouraging learner reflection

In your teaching practice, try to model reflective practice by including journaling, mindfulness or end-of-class check-ins with your learner group.

These activities help learners to develop emotional awareness and see learning as holistic, not just cognitive.

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Activity: The Reflection Wheel

Ask learners to complete a 'Reflection Wheel' on how their mental health affects their learning.

Segments might include energy, focus, self-confidence, support networks and emotions.

This activity promotes discussion and insight.