# Emotional Intelligence

# By Joanne Munroe

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Emotional Intelligence (EI) involves being able to perceive, understand and act on emotions in constructive ways.  Gardner (1983) highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in society, when he linked human abilities such as self awareness and empathy to the more traditional skills of numeracy and literacy. Claxton (2005) argues that after years of 'top down' teaching, where the focus has been on achieving 'pragmatic, practical and measurable' results in the form of high graded academic subjects, the focus is beginning to shift towards a more humane education.

This report will discuss the importance of EI within a local authority nursery establishment.  The research project was undertaken to:

1. Review current procedures and monitor the effectiveness of emotional intelligence play sessions
2. Research and explore how play contributes to our children's emotional intelligence
3. Identify staff's views on emotional intelligence within the nursery
4. Review resources needed to further develop emotional intelligence

This report will also discuss the findings and critically analyse the methodology and research design used.

*Literature review*

Bousted (2005) carried out a survey on Emotional Intelligence in education as he felt that education was recognising not only grades but 'emotional wellbeing of individuals and schools'. This was a wide scale survey aimed at collecting data from a large number of establishments across the education board.   However the purpose of this research aims to produce a smaller more in-depth collection of information from a variety of professionals within one establishment.

Claxton (2005) argues that the shift from 'top down' teaching, towards a more humane education allows children to become 'effective learners' and realise their social and personal development. He discusses the need to address the child's whole social capital, including family life and outside experiences from the community.   It is for this reason that Claxton believes that the interest now

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shown in Emotional Intelligence can only be a positive factor in a child's education.

In 1983, Gardner highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in society when he linked human abilities such as self awareness and empathy to the more traditional skills of numeracy and literacy. Claxton (2005) believes that by placing the title 'Intelligence' above these 'human abilities' Gardner unwittingly '*legitimised their claim on teacher's time and attention.'*(Claxton, 2005 pg 7)

 Goleman (1996) suggests that it is critical to explore and create positive emotional habits to enable children to become strong emotionally, in turn allowing them to develop intellectually.  Although, the Curriculum for Excellence (2008) aims to broaden the developmental needs of children throughout nursery and school, practitioners are often disclosing the pressure that local authorities place on numeracy and literacy to develop children's 'intellect'.  Childcare practitioners may therefore lack the resources and time to include the social and emotional needs of children in their daily childcare routines.  Mosley (1996) suggests that play sessions such as Quality Circle Time can develop better relationships, build bonds and improve positive behaviour.   She argues that this works best if all children, staff and parents can at some point be involved creating a community that understands the need for strong emotional bonds.

Goleman (1996) argues that although hereditary genetics can play a part in our temperament this is not our destiny and can be altered through emotional lessons learnt throughout early childhood. He explains that it is critical to explore and create positive 'emotional habits' to enable us to become strong emotionally which will in turn allow us to develop intellectually.

Gardner (1985) explains that multiple intelligences are needed to define the complex human abilities and refers to how intelligence is measured scientifically. He states that a child who is capable of completing mathematic sums is not overall more intelligent than the next child who can express his feelings or empathise with others in his peer group.   It is this reason that emotional intelligence is highlighted in education as Gardner states that there are different kinds of intelligence and none more important than the other. He refers to interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities, both of which need to be addressed in

education curriculum.   Interpersonal abilities allow children the skills to tune into others' feelings whilst intrapersonal abilities allow them to explore and express their own feelings.

By creating strong role models to promote secure relationships in nursery establishments, an association can be made to Bandura's theory on social learning.  Bandura developed a social learning theory similar to Skinner and Pavlov's, which takes into account children's feelings and is not merely depended on human chance or error.   He reinforced issues that behaviour is not only directly influenced by physical reinforcements but by modelling another child or adult's behaviour and feeling the inward rewards of personal satisfaction (Lindon 2005).

*Design, Process & Methodology*

Burns (1997) describes research as a 'systematic investigation', while Mackenzie and Skipe (2006) describe it as an 'inquiry', where data is collected, analysed and interpreted. When starting the research project it was important to clarify the purpose for research, thus  highlighting which questions would needed answered to obtain this data.   This exploratory project looks at current practice, allowing an emancipated approach for professionals and empowers participants with both knowledge and training opportunities.

The original research questions did need strengthened as the initial debate was explored.   During this primitive stage in the project, a literature review on emotional intelligence was carried out in order to learn from previous findings, which also allowed for a deeper understanding and knowledge on this chosen subject.   As the literature review interrogated other professionals work, it became possible to redefine the research questions to give a clearer goal for the research design.

The research design allowed the project to keep track on important issues such as time, resources, purpose and methodological approaches. A mind map was used to explore channels of thought (Appendix 1) and as a result, it became easier to clarify the design of the project and decided on the methodological approaches (Appendix 2).   A GANTT timeline was used to direct and manage the various stages in the project (Appendix 3).   This project used questionnaires

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(Appendix 4) to investigate both staff awareness of emotional intelligence and the current levels of emotional development in place within the nursery. The questionnaires were designed to identify any barriers that staff feel prevent them from implementing successful emotional intelligence sessions, such as a lack of adequate space or resources. Staff also had the opportunity to state any positive practices currently in place that promote emotional development within the workplace.

Questionnaires were designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How does our educational establishment support emotional intelligence?
2. How do we promote this through daily play within the nursery?
3. Are staff aware and confident in promoting emotional intelligence?
4. Are the current resources available to support children's emotional intelligence?

Denscombe (1998) suggests that three characteristics of a survey approach are; there is a wide coverage, specifies a point of time and that the researcher seeks out information that can be measured and recorded. Surveys can be used by many disciplines and come in various forms, for example, questionnaires, interviews, telephone interviews, documents and observations. Kelly and Long (2000) state that in using questionnaires, validity and reliability should be ensured and can be achieved by piloting questionnaires and by their careful construction. Reliability should show consistency of a measurement tool if repeated and validity should measure what it is supposed to measure.

According to Duffy (1986), a questionnaire approach can be useful as the researcher remains detached and impartial which is conducive to analysing data. In this way, there will be little bias from the researcher and objectivity should be guaranteed. Herbert (1990) argues that questionnaires do however pose some limitations such as; questions may be misunderstood, there may be bias in the way the questions are worded by the researcher and the respondents may be tempted to supply the answers that they think the researcher wants to hear.

An emotional intelligence information sheet (Appendix 5) was created to highlight the terminology for the questionnaires, which were kept simple and jargon free where possible. Questionnaires and an emotional intelligence

information sheet were distributed to 16 Child Development Officers and Family Support Workers in the nursery.  Questionnaires were answered anonymously and returned in an envelope to a locked file to protect participants' confidentiality.   Following the return of the questionnaires, it was necessary to conduct several semi-structured interviews to clarify points.   Bell 2005 states that participants should be given freedom to talk about what is important to them during an interview, however by using a semi structured framework they can also be guided by appropriate questions (Appendix 6)   By preparing the questions before hand allowed for simple recording and analysis of data.

Thomas (2007) discusses the various approaches researchers can take.   It was critical that throughout this process the researcher acted as a 'disinterested observer', one without any bias, in order not to influence the participants.   This proved to be quite a difficult task as this project was conducted in a local workplace among colleagues and parents who already have a personal and professional background.  In order to achieve accurate findings the research must not be 'contaminated' with personal view points.   Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe this invalidity as a 'halo effect' where the researcher's previous knowledge of the participant judges their perception and influences the subsequent data.   Having obtained all the relevant data, it was then possible to become a practitioner-researcher and develop workplace practice by implementing policy and training to improve the knowledge and experiences of others.

Management issues that occurred during this project evolved around time. There were a number of occasions where interviews and child observations were planned, however due to rescheduled time by management these were not able to occur as planned.   This proved to be a constant struggle within the research project and alterations were made to the research design to implement more time.

Ethical issues were considered before this research took place and all participants were given the chance for informed consent with the aims and risks of the research highlighted.   They were also offered the chance to withdraw at any given time and any data destroyed if they wish.   MacNaughton and Hugh

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(2009) state that this consent should be given without any enticement and the research steps told in plain, jargon free language.

Privacy and confidentiality were addressed and as this research took place in a local environment, participants needed to be aware that some evidence could be linked back to the establishment.   To avoid a breach of confidentiality, documents were stored under a secure password on the computer and names changed or kept separate from the evidence collected.   Roberts-Holmes (2005) drew attention to the fact that as the research will take place in an educational establishment, the centre should be made aware of the confidentiality procedures as it is opening itself to criticism by allowing the practice and policies to be explored. Ultimately this should prove that the establishment has promoted children's emotional intelligence and can only benefit staff, children and parents.

Roberts-Holmes (2005) stresses that although unintentional, the potential risks involved with promoting positive emotional intelligence may be emotional upset as questions can 'touch on sensitive issues'.   By children and parents having the opportunity to share feelings and emotions creates a higher chance of disclosing upsetting memories or issues.   In order to address these, staff are trained to follow Glasgow City Council management circular 57 and report any child protection issues to management.   A Family support worker was available to work with parents and families to talk through problems should they arise. Glasgow City Council procedures and policies were followed throughout and authorisation for the research requested from the nursery management.

*Findings and Analysis of Research Project*

Claxton (2005) believes that emotional intelligence can be measured in two ways; 'self-report measures and performance measures. You can ask people to rate themselves, using various kinds of interview or questionnaire to elicit their self reports. Or you can give them things to do, and see how well they do them.' The research methods used relied on 'self report measures' where participants could comment on their own understanding of emotional intelligence and their daily practice.

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The research questions asked for a variety of answers that can be both qualitative and quantitative. They sought the viewpoints from professionals and allowed the opportunity to see if there was a need to alter the routine of the nursery.  O'Leary (2004) differentiates qualitative and quantitative data by exploring qualitative data through words, pictures or icons and quantitative data represented by numbers and statistics.  Gorard (2004) argues that the combination of both qualitative and quantitative data is the "key element in the improvement of social science, including education research" (p.7), he stresses that this has greater impact and less waste of useful information.  Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) agree that it is most beneficial to use both qualitative and quantitative data within a research project as policy makers often prefer to evaluate quantitative data whilst qualitative data is more easily remembered as a story or view point.

In order to analyse the data it was necessary to organise the information.  This was done through a colour coding system which allowed an easy view point and linked each theme that emerged to a research question from the research proposal.  Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) discuss the need for coding to pull together relevant material into a structure.  Miles and Huberman (1984) state that by coding the information the researcher can quickly observe any frequency or pattern that may emerge. Colour coding was therefore used in the transcription of the interviews and also with the questionnaires and configured into a graph or collated in a table of thoughts.  The primary questionnaires and interview transcripts were photocopied and marked secondary before colour coding.

From the questionnaires (Appendix 4), questions 1, 2 and 3 linked to the research question 3.   Before reading the information booklet provided on emotional intelligence, 44% of participants had not heard of this term.  When asked about training 50% of participants stated that they had received previous professional training on this subject and felt they would be confident in implementing emotional development within the nursery.  Conversely, this left a large number of the workforce unsure or unconfident when dealing with this subject.   Question 4, 5 and 6 from the questionnaire related to the research questions 1 and 4.   This data was analysed as quantitative and presented in a graph (Appendix 7).   These findings showed that a majority of participants felt

that the timetable proved successful in allowing for emotional intelligence to be explored within the nursery; the physical layout/space to explore was adequate and an equal number of participants felt the resources were either adequate or successful.

Having reviewed the questionnaires and reflected on the style of questions, it would have been beneficial to use a 5 point Likert scale (Likert, 1932).   By adding a range in the scale where respondents can clarify the level of agreement it would have been possible to further evaluate the nurseries effectiveness of emotional intelligence.   Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) stress that one respondent's 'agree' may be another's 'strongly agree'.   It is from this view point that another grade of 'very successful' should have been added to the questionnaires.   They argue that by creating a short 3 point scale, participants may navigate to the central 'adequate' option to avoid using the two extreme poles. Participants may also feel that they do not have enough choice when answering the question. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007)

Bell (2005) discusses Likert scale in a similarly way to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), however notes that by using this scale eliminates the participants' choice of adding additional comments.   To eliminate this problem from the research, an open ended question was added to the questionnaire to allow staff to comment on current daily routines that support and promote emotional intelligence.  This data is described as qualitative and was presented in a table format (Appendix 8).

During semi-structured interviews, one participant was quoted saying 'they were not aware of the term emotional intelligence'.  However since reading the information leaflet had though it would be a good idea to have an 'achievement wall' for parents, staff and children to highlight any positive life experiences they had received.   She stated she would like to nominate a parent that had just passed her driving test.

Three participants commented during the interviews on the space within the nursery and stated that they would like 'more quiet areas, where children can go to escape the busy playroom.'   Following interviews with staff and their expressed wishes to create more space within the playroom, it was necessary to explore further literature.   Jones and Pound (2008) address the issue of

organised time and space and argue that an affective play-based curriculum should provide children with long periods of uninterrupted time for their play to develop.   They reinforced the participant's idea of 'quiet areas' and argued that children should also have access to large areas of space both indoors and out to explore and experience play opportunities.   Children need to feel safe and comfortable in the learning environment and by directly involving them in the decisions to change room layout or timetable will give them ownership of their experiences. (Jones and Pound, 2008)

One limitation of this research project could be seen in convenience sampling in questionnaires.   This could be criticised as the participants were of similar social circumstances and in the same setting and may not give a valid overview of the public's opinions in general.   Denscombe (1998) states that using convenience sampling is not good research, but agrees that an element of convenience enters into the selection of most samples.   To provide validity, nurseries and schools covering a wide area could be selected with an intake of participants from various social backgrounds which could be extended to include parents' and children's opinions.   This would give more credibility to the research.

Clifford (1997) states that quantitative research dismisses the experiences of individuals, which generates problems for practitioners who view education holistically, however by including both qualitative and quantitative data this limitation was addressed.

Following the findings, a training programme was put in place for emotional intelligence, initially for professionals then for parents within the nursery.  Since the research project, one participant's idea of an achievement wall has been added to the hallway of the nursery and already has 12 achievements from parents and staff ranging from 'driving tests' to cooking their first 'Sunday roast for the family'.   As discussed in the findings staff are in the process of creating a children's committee to discuss a room layout with smaller quiet areas.

*Conclusion*

The analysis of completed questionnaires and interviews provided an insight into current emotional intelligence perceptions in the nursery setting.  These include staff awareness, staff confidence, resources and daily practice of emotional development.  Through researching emotional intelligence in one nursery, the

development of new emotional intelligence sessions and practices can be discussed, ensuring children have the opportunity to fully develop emotionally and socially.

Having successfully carried out a research project it was possible to reflect and critically analyse methodology and research design.  Identified methodological improvements will allow future research to further evaluate emotional intelligence and its contribution to children's early years' experience.

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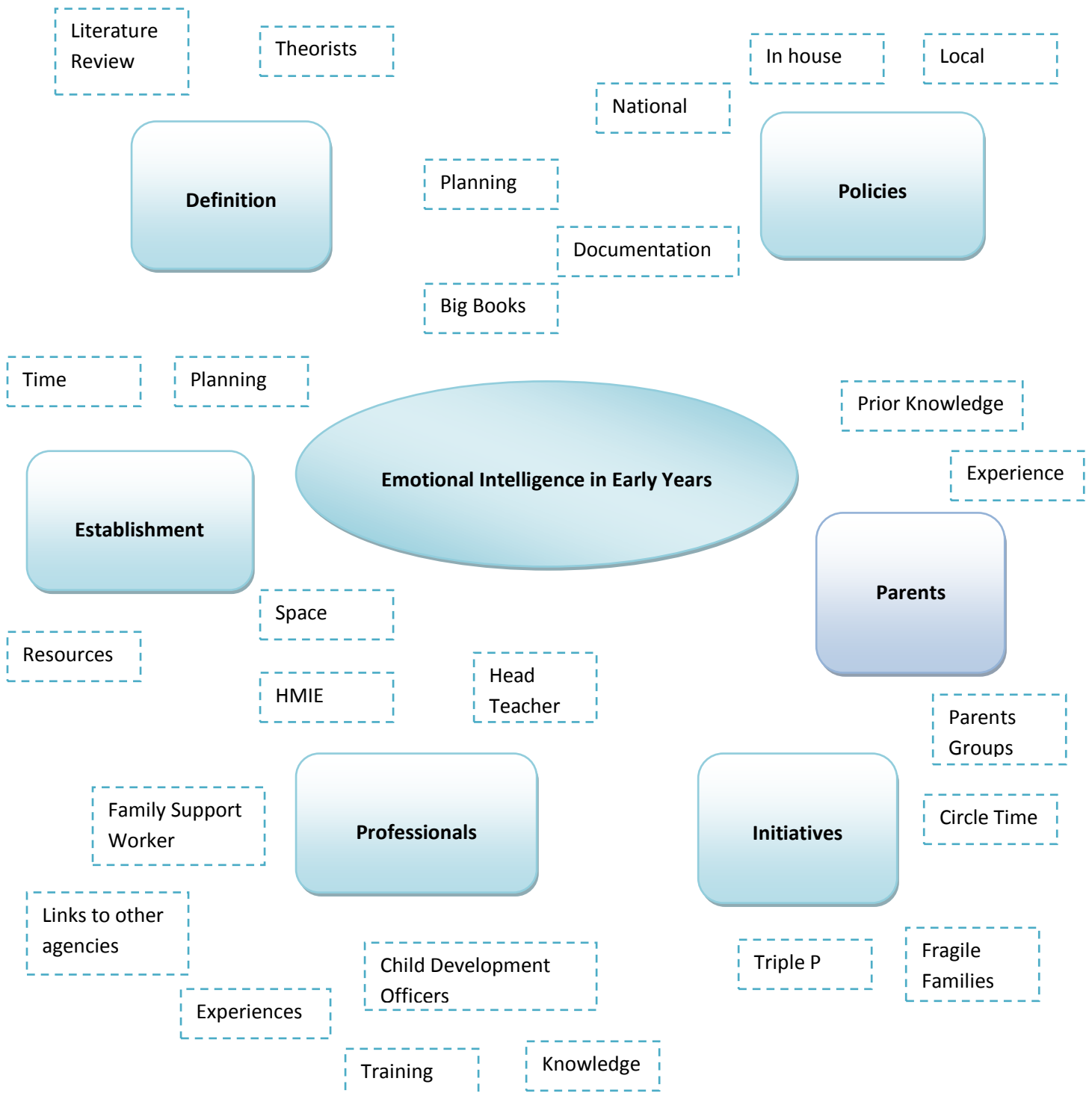
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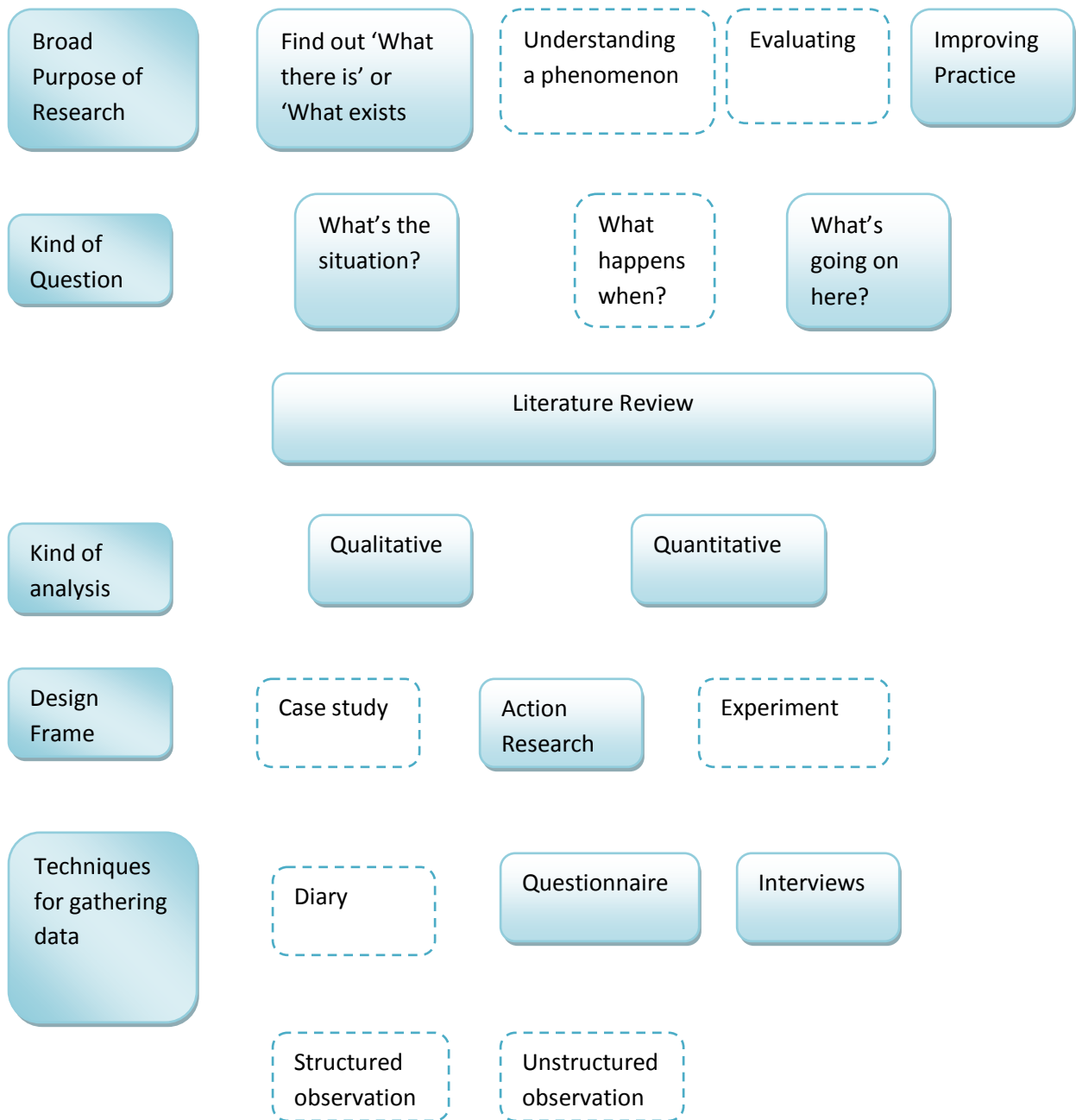Thomas, G (2007) *How to do your Research Project.* London: SAGE

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## Appendix 1 - Mind Map

Literature Review

Theorists

In house

Local

National

**Definition**

Planning

**Policies**

Documentation

Big Books

Time

Planning

Prior Knowledge

Emotional Intelligence in Early Years

Experience

**Establishment**

**Parents**

Space

Resources

Parents Groups

HMIE

Head Teacher

Circle Time

Family Support Worker

**Professionals**

**Initiatives**

Links to other agencies

Child Development Officers

Triple P

Fragile Families

Experiences

Knowledge

Training

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## Appendix 2 – Research Design

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Broad Purpose of Research** | Find out 'What there is' or 'What exists | Understanding a phenomenon | Evaluating | Improving Practice |
| **Kind of Question** | What's the situation? | What happens when? | What's going on here? | |

**Literature Review**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Kind of analysis** | Qualitative | Quantitative |
| **Design Frame** | Case study | Action Research | Experiment |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Techniques for gathering data** | Diary | Questionnaire | Interviews |
| | Structured observation | Unstructured observation | |

Thomas, G (2007) *How to do your Research Project.* London: SAGE. Pg 92

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Appendix 4 - Questionnaire

## **Emotional Intelligence**

I am interested in researching the degree of emotional intelligence offered to children within the nursery setting and investigating how prepared staff feel including emotional intelligence sessions in their daily routine.  This questionnaire has been designed to highlight any barriers preventing successful emotional intelligence sessions and pinpoint any positive practices which are currently in place.

Please answer as honestly as possible as these questionnaires are anonymous.

**Thank you.**

Q1/ Before reading the emotional intelligence information booklet were you

aware of the        term emotional intelligence?

Yes                  No                Unsure

Q2/ In your professional capacity have you ever had training on emotional

intelligence?

Yes                  No                Unsure

Q3/ If Yes, do you now feel confident implementing emotional development in

the nursery?

Yes                  No                Unsure

Q4/ How well do you feel the nursery resources supports children's emotional

well being?

Successfully        Adequately          Unsuccessfully        Unsure

Q5/ How well do you feel the nursery space supports emotional development?

Successfully        Adequately          Unsuccessfully        Unsure

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Q6/ How well do you feel the nursery timetable supports emotional intelligence?

Successfully      Adequately      Unsuccessfully      Unsure

Q7/ Do you feel parents would benefit from involvement in emotional intelligence sessions?

Yes            No           Unsure

Q8/ Which aspects of daily routine do you feel currently promote emotional intelligence?

_____

Q9/ Can you suggest ways to promote children's shared knowledge of feelings and emotions?
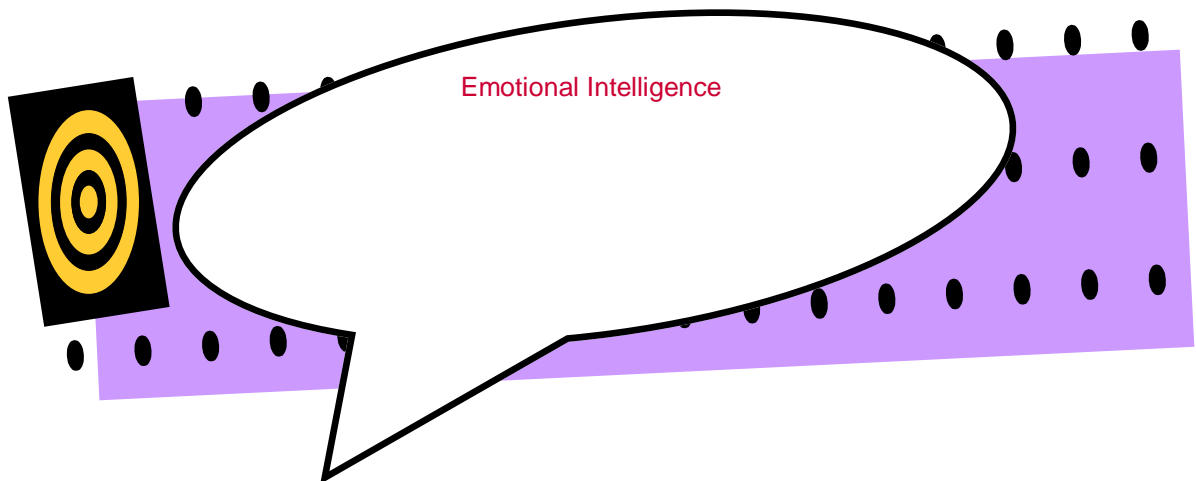
_____

**End of Questionnaire**

**Please place in attached envelope and return to………………, Child Development Officer.**

**Thank you for your time.**

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Appendix 5 – Emotional Intelligence Information Sheet

Emotional Intelligence

**Emotional development of children**

Emotional intelligence can also be known as social development and involves being able to perceive, understand and act on emotions in constructive ways.

Children need to become confident at understanding their own emotions and reacting to others. Gardner (1985) describes this as Interpersonal and Intrapersonal abilities which allow children the skills to tune into others feelings and enables them to explore and express their own feelings.

**Emotional Intelligence Sessions**

<u>Benefits to Children</u>
- Increased Self-awareness and Confidence
- Ability to Understand Emotions and Behaviour
- Increased Empathy

<u>Examples of EI sessions</u>
- Circle time
- Persona dolls

**Appendix 6 – Interview Questions**

Semi structured interviews took place with 3 participants to elaborate on the findings from the questionnaires. The following questions were used as a guide for the interviews-

1. Which aspects of the nursery best support Emotional Intelligence?

2. Which areas lack support for Emotional Intelligence?

3. What resources do you use regularly to develop children's Emotional Intelligence?

4. What training would you feel could benefit your practice of Emotional Intelligence?

5. Do you feel parents would benefit from an awareness of their Emotional Intelligence and how could we as a nursery promote this?

## Appendix 7 – Quantitative Results

How well do you feel the nursery resources, space and time supports children's Emotional Intelligence?
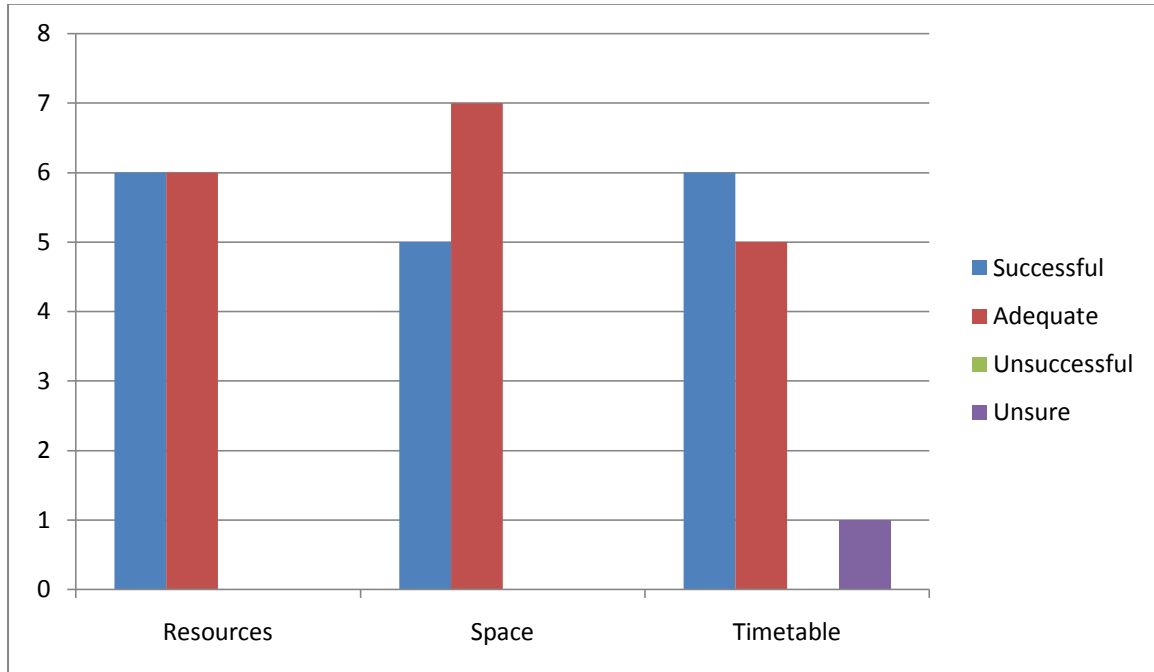
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Appendix 8 – Qualitative Results

*Information from Interviews:*

Q1. Which aspects of the nursery best support Emotional Intelligence?

Q2. Which areas lack support for Emotional Intelligence?

Q3. What resources do you use regularly to develop children's Emotional Intelligence?

Q4. What training would you feel could benefit your practice of Emotional Intelligence?

Q5. Do you feel parents would benefit from an awareness of their Emotional Intelligence and how could we as a nursery promote this?

|  | Participant 1 | Participant 2 | Participant 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Question 1 | Group time, Routines. | Outdoors space to explore and socialise | Snack time, Role play, Responsive planning. |
| Question 2 | No quiet areas | Welcome time can be too busy and noisy, No dens for children to hide. | Little one to one time, No quiet areas. |
| Question 3 | Feelings box | Circle time | Special time |
| Question 4 | How to deliver EI into the daily timetable | Circle time training | Triple P training to help parent and child attachment. |
| Question 5 | Yes. Notices on parent board. | Yes. Information during parent's evenings. | Yes. Achievement wall for staff and parents |

Table of Results from Questionnaires

| Questions | Response |
|---|---|
| Which aspects of daily routine currently promote Emotional Intelligence? | Group time, Story time, Routines, Books, Circle time, Snack time, Responsive planning, Free play, Role play, Imaginative play, Special time, Singing time, Big books, Golden rules, Consultation, Learning journals. |
| Suggested ways to promote children's shared knowledge of feelings and emotions. | Emotion puppets, Persona dolls, Picture cards, Adult scribing for children, Games, Drama, Achievement wall. |