

# Feel good, learn well

**Simon Houlton and Stephen Ellis** report on recent research which suggests that when students use their emotional intelligence in a collaborative teamwork situation and undertake new challenges, they feel positive about themselves and their learning. In other words, when you feel good you learn well.

## Introduction

Geographical enquiry as a way of opening and developing learners' thinking has been an approach that geography teachers have realised since the mid 1970s but this has not always a strong feature of practice (Rawling, 2001). It is our belief that the benefits of enquiry are enhanced further by aspects of social and emotional learning, in particular when related to aspects of emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman describes emotional intelligence as: 'the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well, in ourselves and in our relationships' (Goleman, 1998). His emotional competence framework (Figure 1) comprises personal competences (self-awareness, self regulation and motivation) and social competences (empathy and social skills). These competences are largely learned rather than fixed genetically. Five classes are identified which can be grouped into personal (1-3) and social competence (4 and 5).

Recent research (Riley *et al.*, 2006) suggests that when learners use their emotional intelligence in a collaborative teamwork situation and undertake new challenges, they feel positive about themselves and their learning. In other words, when you feel good you learn well. This case study is based on the

assumption that by combining geographical enquiry with aspects of emotional intelligence it is possible to develop the capacity of the learner (emotionally and geographically) and to promote greater enjoyment of the learning process with strong implications for the quality of future learning and associated motivation. These motivational benefits of enquiry help to increase individual engagement with an activity by promoting the flow of learning.

In addition the enquiry process provides a framework for developing an individual's own thinking and has the capability to transform their learning leading to a deeper, more profound understanding of geography and the learning process.

## The enquiry route

A framework for learning through geographical enquiry developed by Roberts (2003) identifies four crucial components:

1. Creating a need to know (ask questions; identify issues; and suggest an appropriate route for investigation)
2. Using data (collect, select, record and present data and select and use appropriate skills and techniques to do this)
3. Making sense of data (describe, explain and analyse evidence; appreciate values and attitudes; and draw and justify conclusions)
4. Reflecting on learning (evaluate critically and suggest improvements and future enquiry).

An important element of this framework is the cyclical enquiry route requiring the learner to reflect on the nature and process of their enquiry. This enables the learner to construct new meaning and to apply their newly developed knowledge to influence future thinking and enquiry.

1. Self-awareness: emotional awareness; accurate self-assessment; self-confidence
2. Motivation: achievement drive; commitment; initiative; optimism
3. Self-regulation: conscientiousness; adaptability; innovation
4. Empathy: understanding others; developing others
5. Adeptness in relationships: influence; communication; leadership; collaboration and co-operation.

Figure 1: The emotional competence framework with examples. After Goleman, 1998.

## The role of experiential learning in enquiry fieldwork

The enquiry route discussed above links directly to social constructivist theories of experiential learning. Experiential learning differs from other forms as it involves 'action, with psycho-motor involvement or physical engagement' (Moon, 1999), although others have defined it more widely.

This might be seen superficially as just kinaesthetic learning. However, this does not fully explain experiential learning. Kolb (1984) illustrates experiential learning through the learners' engagement with a concrete experience (e.g. fieldwork). The ability for learners to reflect on this experience and analyse it in a more abstract manner (e.g. apply this to a geographical model) is key to being able to construct new and wider meaning from the experience. The learning process is cyclical when these new ideas are then applied through 'active experimentation' to a new experience (Figure 2).

## The importance of emotion in reflection

The role of reflection in the learning process is well documented. Dewey (1933) described it as: 'the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious thought'. This thinking not only enables learners to illustrate previous thinking but actively generates new thoughts.

This process is not always easy. The attention that needs to be given to learners' emotions in order to generate effective reflection and make new meaning from an experience is important (Boud *et al.*, 1993). It is only when learners are enabled to attend to their own feelings (and remove any obstruc-

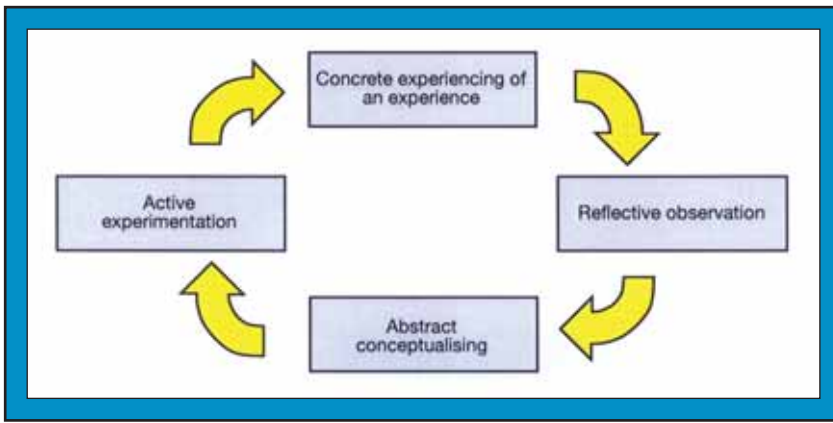


Figure 2: The experiential learning cycle. Simplified from Kolb, 1984.

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tive ones) that the reflective process can develop and generate new perspectives on their experience and a readiness to apply these to a new experience (Figure 3). Emotions can either highjack our ability to think rationally or place us in a state of readiness that increases engagement and flow in learning. Without awareness of the impact of our negative emotions, it is all too easy for the learner to remain in a negative cycle of entrapment, restricting the development of new, positive perspectives on experiences.

The following fieldwork enquiry utilises reflective elements of the emotional competence framework to promote the cyclical experiential approach and builds on the learners' self-awareness and empathy to develop the enquiry process.

### The Rocking Floyd Enquiry

This case study was developed with the help of students on the Teach First Summer School at Canterbury Christ Church University and was inspired by

the celebrity TV family the Osbornes. By framing the study in a relevant cultural setting it was hoped that this would have student appeal. The family setting of the study provided a small, personal, yet geographically relevant, scale for the students to connect with the family and their own feelings. The study revolves around the needs and interests of a fictitious rock star known as Red Floyd, who is the lead singer of Death Weapon, his wife Barbarella, a top fashion designer, and their family. The enquiry question set was: 'Do the villages of Trottiscliffe and Wrotham cater for the varying needs and interests of the Floyd family?'

The students were set the following task: You are an Estate Agent. Your task is to help the Floyd family decide if they should move to Trottiscliffe or Wrotham Village, which are situated in Kent. The family has a budget of £5,000,000.

They were then given information about the occupation of the parents, plus the needs and interests of all the

family members. Previously students had discussed the terminology associated with settlement and begun to develop a sense of place about the two villages through a PowerPoint resource using digital imagery and background information.

To help students decide which village location was most appropriate for the Floyds, the following fieldwork activities were devised:

- Take a clipboard, work sheets, data logger and a digital camera to help you collect information about the village.
- Walk around the villages in small groups, photographing aspects of the settlement which cater for the needs and interests of each family member.
- Complete a traffic survey.
- Complete a traffic management survey for each village.
- Find out what the village is like by following the photo trail.
- Complete a survey assessing the environmental quality of the village.
- Assess your own feelings of the village by using the bipolar emotion sheet (Figure 4).

Following the fieldwork the students were asked to complete the following activities:

- In your group complete the chart entitled 'How does the village cater for the needs and interests of the family?' (Figure 5).

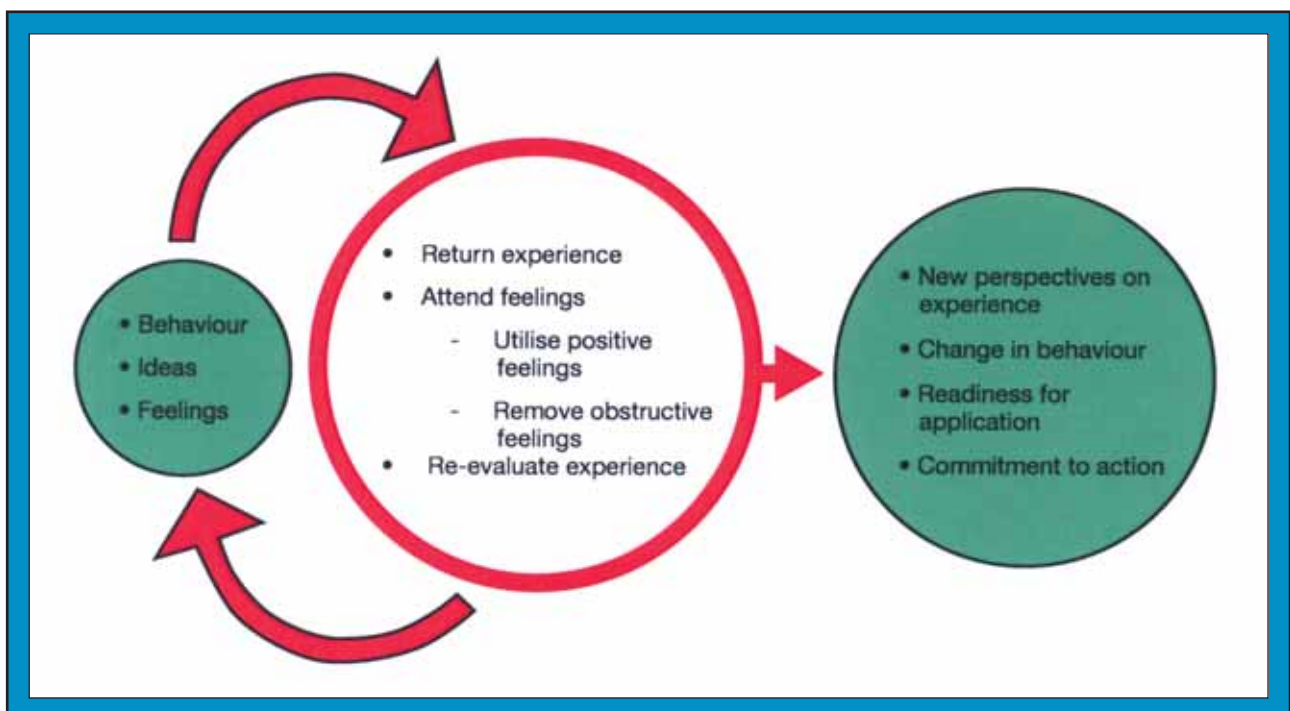


Figure 3: The reflective process in context. Adapted from Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985).

- Write an estate agent's report about how the village meets the needs and interests of each member of the family. Your letter should include information on the types and costs of houses, facilities in the village, accessible transport links, the environment of the village and its surrounding area.
- Read your letter to your estate agent colleagues who visited the other village.

**Extension activity**

- After reading both reports, the family are still having difficulty in deciding whether to move to Trottiscliffe or Wrotham. They have asked you to help them decide.
- Prepare a PowerPoint presentation providing reasons why the family should either live in Trottiscliffe or Wrotham.

**Reflection on the enquiry**

Learning teams follow a photo trail around the village to gain a structured but open experience of the village,

leading to a personal sense of place and community. The data collection for the enquiry uses a range of qualitative and quantitative methods, including taking digital photographs, use of a data-logger and a traffic management survey.

The opportunity to work in learning teams enabled individuals to develop their personal and social competences. Some students were able to develop aspects of self-awareness through adopting a role within the team based on their strengths, while others developed competences of self-management by being conscientious, being adaptable and by showing initiative. Other students were able to develop their social awareness by displaying empathy towards others in the group and by using their skills of organisational awareness. Finally, for some students, learning teams provided opportunities to use their social competences by displaying qualities of leadership, collaboration and teamwork.

The bi-polar emotion sheet (Figure 4) provides a structure for the learners to consider their feelings about the village and then to record them. This tool became invaluable in helping students to distinguish their own feelings about

the villages of Wrotham and Trottiscliffe from those of the four characters of the study. They could demonstrate that they could show empathy with the Floyd family and at the same time recognise their own feelings in the process of decision-making.

**Questions for discussion**

- How does the village make me feel?
- Compare your score with other members in your group. What differences do you notice?
- How do you think your feelings about the village differ from those of the family?

Once the learners have considered their feelings about the village, they are asked to discuss this with members of their learning team. This enables the learners' intra-personal and inter-personal intelligences to be exercised through the use of their personal and social competences. Discussion of this develops learners' social skills as well as allowing them to reflect on their own feelings in the light of their peers'

How does the village make you feel? My emotional response to the village								
Negative feelings	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	Positive feelings
Sad								Happy
Scared								Not scared
Uptight								Relaxed
Bored								Inspired
Confused								Clear-headed
Unsafe								Safe
Unknowing								Knowing
Unenthusiastic								Enthusiastic
Oppressed								Free
Non-plussed								Exhilarated
My score								

Figure 4: The bi-polar emotion recording sheet.

Member of the Family	What are their needs and interests?	What does the village have to offer them?	What is missing in the village?	Suitable or not?
Red Floyd				
Barbarella Floyd				
Tiger Lilly Floyd				
Lloyd Floyd				

Figure 5: A village survey of the needs and interests of the family.

responses. The self and peer reflection enables new meaning to be constructed via the negotiation in the learning team. This wider and deeper understanding of the village is then applied to the individual needs of the Floyd family and recorded on a table (Figure 5).

The structure of the enquiry framework, enabling students to be in touch with their feelings and harnessing the power of learning teams, improved the students' ability to form new geographical ideas and knowledge and their capacity to understand their learning.

### A model to underpin future practice. How do I learn best?

To enhance the students' flow of learning a model to engage meta-learning utilising emotional intelligence was designed (Figure 6). It was constructed to help them focus on the study's enquiry process and to make them aware of how their emotions could maximise their learning potential. After the enquiry was explained, the students were asked to consider what their goal for the day would be. They were asked to consider the organisational skills necessary for collecting data and to share out the data collection tasks as a team.

The students were expected to use their interpersonal skills of negotiation, communication and empathy in identifying the strengths of each group member to collect the data. Before carrying out the tasks they were asked to share with each other what might be difficult and how they might feel in terms of their emotions. In other words, they were expected to be aware of their own potential emotions and those of each member in the group. They were asked to consider the choices that would be open to them if something did not go to plan. What would they do? How would this make them feel? How should they react in this situation? By anticipating how they might feel, we were asking them to become more self and socially aware. We believe this

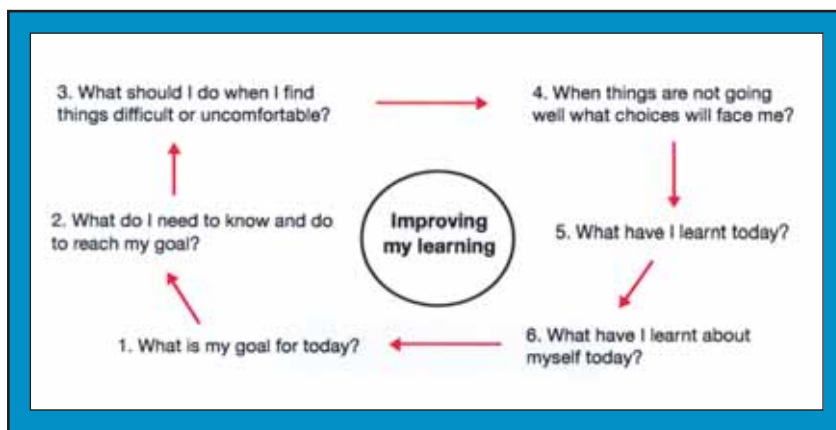


Figure 6: How do I learn best?

process benefited their flow of learning. By engaging the students' emotional intelligence with geographical enquiry the group's collaborative ability and group intelligence were maximised. The reflection on the enquiry and learning process appeared to develop a deeper understanding of

the study's aims and an awareness of how students learn best. The students' confidence level increased through the reflection and recording of what they had learnt about the study and themselves. In short, the model reinforces the initial idea that when you feel good you learn well. ■

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