
Rewiring Emotions: Unlearning through Language Games to Build Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract:

In educational and professional environments, emotional intelligence (EI) is increasingly recognized as essential for motivation, collaboration, and effective communication. However, conventional EI training often neglects the need to unlearn deeply ingrained emotional and linguistic habits shaped by cultural and social conditioning. The paper explores a novel approach to emotional development through structured, language-based games that foster emotional reframing, empathy, and self-awareness. Drawing from cognitive linguistics, neuroscience, communication theory, and experiential learning, this paper presents a conceptual framework and a series of prototype activities designed to promote emotional rewiring and affective language use. The paper also addresses the role of EI in English language teaching, emphasizing personalized, meaningful communication that encourages learners to express feelings and build interpersonal understanding. By integrating emotional intelligence with language instruction, the paper aims to shift from content-focused teaching toward process-oriented, human-centered learning that values empathy, dialogue, and the unlearning of restrictive communicative norms.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, unlearning, language games, emotional rewiring, affective communication, experiential learning

Introduction

Every time I learn something new, I feel as though I've lost something. This feeling reinforces my belief that in order to truly grow, we must accept that a seed can only sprout by ceasing to be a seed. This paper explores an emerging perspective: *unlearning* — not as the opposite of learning, but as its natural extension. Unlearning is about releasing what we

already know, making room for the unknown to take root. It's more than simply revising or reorganizing past knowledge; it's about shedding our blinders. And when we do, we begin to see the world anew — with fresh possibilities, different approaches, and innovative solutions to challenges that once seemed insurmountable. The world becomes quite different, with new possibilities approaches to, and innovative situations that previously seemed difficult.

Learning useful ignorance

This is one new disposition that learners need to acquire fast the disposition to be usefully ignorant. 'Not knowing' needs to be put to work without shame or bluster. This sort of thinking calls for pedagogy for knowing what to do when you don't know what to do. Thus, a greater emphasis is on the experimental culture of learning, rather than a culture in which curriculum and pedagogy are fully locked in' in advance of engagement.

Theories of unlearning

Unlearning is deleting where obsolete knowledge is deleted and new knowledge is created. It means keeping the mind free from unwanted information, deleting irrelevant data from the memory, and having more free space in the mind for future knowledge. Unlearning is stored for later where obsolete knowledge is not erased, it is stored and can be retrieved when returning to the old context. Unlearning is redefining where we never pause to unlearn before we engage in learning and adaptation.

All learning has an emotional base. The paper deals with emotional intelligence: the innate mental module that is dedicated to the task of mastering a language. According to Daniel Goleman, Emotional intelligence serves both internal mechanisms and external environments in the process of language learning. Emotional intelligence and empathy are just beginning to be part of second language acquisition/learning. Emotional Intelligence can guide us in the what and how of unlearning to learn. Learning a language is not a matter of neuromuscular maturation. It is a skill. The command of a foreign language can be known by the ability to perform in it and performance can be measured by the ability to understand, speak, read, and write.

Now the major question is: how do we equip our students with the ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn? The Introduction of the new teaching methodology. Implementation of the strategy, and meta-cognition (the ability to think about your thinking) is the answer to the question. Using different techniques such as co-operative learning, and brain-storming. Peer-discussion. Sci-fi-assessment and creative writing. Language learners learn to perceive emotions. Differentiate between emotions and subsequent need to take appropriate action in response to negative affect which could be a deterrent to language learning. The implication is that learners can enjoy the communicative facilities and experience lower levels of

language anxiety if teachers rely on emotion-generating and emotion-managing techniques. Through cognitive-affective courses, we can appropriately tackle some of the affective and communication problems besetting the classrooms and evaluate language performance in an optimistic light, leading to better L2 learning performance. Also. Materials developers, curriculum designers, and educators should pay utmost attention to EI skills, which relate to social and emotional functions of language, and finally incorporate them into their syllabuses.

Fear psychosis is an inhibition.

Accents can be hard to understand. For example, you might coach a New Yorker to simply pronounce his r's-New York, not New Yawk- but moving from theory to practice is often difficult. Changing your accent is a matter of learning a whole new set of muscle controls. To expect someone to quickly learn a new accent would be like expecting them to quickly master a perfect backhand swing if they've never played tennis. Before. Thus, it is seen that language learning is threatening to learners because much pressure is put on the correct pronunciation, grammar, and perfect accent:

I can't speak.

I am not fluent.

Start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.

Explaining the rules simply won't do it. It takes determination. Patience. And a lot of practice. But it seems to be a type of language evolution. This paper is a study on emotional intelligence, together with empathy and fear psychosis, which are two important affective factors involved in the process of second or foreign language learning. It is a situation-specific type of anxiety associated with a fear of negative evaluation. Test anxiety and communication apprehension are experienced by some foreign language learners (Horwitz, 125–132) emotion-loaded messages are expressed through voice. Tone. Stories and facial expressions. An emotionally intelligent student who sees the Deeting expression of amusement in the face of a teacher understands more about others' emotions and thoughts than another student who misses such a signal. Empathy as another important affective factor in the language learning context is a multifactorial concept that has its origin in the Greek word *empathus*, meaning understanding others by entering their world (Broidy, 26). Brown defines it as "the process of reaching beyond the self and understanding and feeling what another person is understanding or feeling" (143).

The language of the EQ

Learners tend to over-complicate how they feel and/or blame another person. The paper aims to persuade learners to state their feelings directly and works on the language of emotions:

You're driving a bit too fast, aren't you?" (meaning please slow down)

Your driving is rough (blaming the driver) rather than I'm scared.

The language teacher, however, has the advantage of being able to encourage learners to use the simple language of emotions before they have the range of language to complicate matters. The language used here is best seen in terms of functions.

Labelling feelings

I feel I am angry/impatient/
bitter/frightened!

feel distracted by this other issue at the moment,
can we talk in ten minutes?

Empathizing

understand/accept / realize.

Empathy can be seen as a complex multifactorial concept, for which language can play a significant role because, as Brown states “language is the primary means of empathizing. I understand we should go with this project proposal” (143).

Suggesting

you could/might.

I’m not suggesting that you engage in the verbal gymnastics necessary to avoid using the word “you” altogether.

Stating wants and needs

you need/ would like/want to /would like you to dispose of all unnecessary equipment.

The formulaic expressions help to restructure our language style to express what we think, feel, and want. There is also language to be avoided. Mainly to do with the functions of giving commands and strong advice (I/ you should), obligation (I/ you must), and blaming (you’re insensitive, you’re making me jealous). Conscious awareness of the models and structures may help the learner master the structures rather than be limited by them. But the models must be mastered. For thought to flow into communication. This is done through practice and use.

Self-direction and collaborative learning

We need to unlearn the idea that every student needs to learn the same content when really what they need to learn is how to self-direct their learning. Meta-cognition leads to self-monitoring, that is to be aware of when one starts to lose meaning or make a mistake, and then self-correct by drawing on one’s repertoire of strategies to regain meaning or correct the mistake. In the following examples the word or words in parentheses are uncalled for and should be omitted:

They appeared to be talking (together) on private affairs.

You need not wonder that the (subject) matter of his discourse was excellent; it was taken from the Bible.

He took wine and water and mixed them (both) together.

With meta-cognition, one can reflect upon one’s learning and take the appropriate action.

Collaborative reading and writing activities as well as group speaking activities may be utilized. Students should be aware of how they learn and have the language facility and flexibility to monitor and manage their literacy learning. Group composition should be changed often since there is a tendency for high EQ students to work together, but EQ can also be learned by example.

Modeling

Monitoring Independence

Sharing

Guiding

Developing EQ and good communicative language teaching go hand in hand, however the group dynamics. Necessary for meaningful interaction in the classroom does not occur automatically, but needs to be fostered through techniques that build confidence, create a positive classroom atmosphere, and encourage cooperation. Keeping this in mind unlearning is done by introducing a few language games for the thorough understanding of the subject.

The “**Literary Riddle – Who’s the Author?**” activity is a collaborative classroom game where students analyze symbolic visual clues to identify authors and their works, enhancing their understanding of global literature and critical thinking skills. The goal is to help students recognize major literary figures, interpret visual metaphors, and solve riddles in teams. To play, teachers need a projector or smartboard, visual clue images (e.g., knife, cockroach, envelope, apple, quill, maze), a scoreboard, and optionally buzzers and author cards. The class is divided into teams of 3–5 students. In each round, a symbolic image is shown, and teams have 30-60 seconds to discuss and either buzz in or write their answer. Points are awarded: 2 for correctly naming the author, 1 bonus point each for identifying the work and country/genre. Sample clues include a knife for Shakespeare’s tragedies, a cockroach for Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, and an envelope for Jane Austen’s epistolary novels. Follow-up activities include a creative challenge to design riddles, reflective writing on symbolism, and a bonus round using audio or partially hidden book covers.

The Finger Method simplifies the use of English articles (“A,” “An,” and “The”) by associating them with the five fingers on your hand. The thumb represents “AN,” used before words starting with a vowel sound (e.g., “an apple,” “an umbrella”). Just as the thumb is essential for gripping, vowels are crucial for sentence structure. The index, ring, and pinky fingers represent “A,” used before words starting with consonant sounds (e.g., “a car,” “a dog,” “a house”). These fingers symbolize precision and handling, similar to how “A” applies to most everyday nouns. The middle finger, the tallest, symbolizes “THE,” used for

specific or unique things (e.g., “the sun,” “the best player,” “the tallest building”). Like the middle finger’s prominence, “THE” highlights importance or uniqueness. This method provides a visual and memorable way to understand article usage in English.

Pick, Pack, Bang is a fast-paced team-building game that enhances teamwork, communication, and quick thinking. The class is divided into teams of three, each assigned a specific role: “Pick” stands on the right, “Pack” on the left, and “Bang” in the middle. Each team is given a unique number. When the teacher calls a team number, that team must respond in sequence: the Pick says “Pick!”, the Pack says “Pack, Team [their number]!”, and the Bang says “Bang, Team [any other active team number]!” The turn is then passed to the new team. If a team responds incorrectly, out of order, or hesitates, they are eliminated, and their number is no longer in play. Teams cannot call their own number or that of any eliminated team, or they risk disqualification. The game continues, promoting alertness, listening skills, and coordinated team responses—key components of effective communication and collaboration.

The concept of unlearning—letting go of ingrained habits or assumptions to embrace new ways of thinking—can be effectively incorporated into activities like “Literary Riddles,” “The Finger Method for Mastering Articles,” and “Pick, Pack, Bang.” In the Literary Riddles game, students move beyond memorization by engaging with symbolic visual clues, challenging them to rethink how they connect literary works to visual metaphors, instead of relying solely on rote memorization. This encourages them to unlearn traditional, passive recall in favor of more creative, interpretive thinking. Similarly, the Finger Method for teaching articles transforms grammar learning by replacing abstract rules with visual metaphors tied to body parts. This technique encourages students to unlearn anxiety around grammar and instead view the rules through a playful, embodied lens, helping them internalize the concepts more intuitively. In Pick, Pack, Bang, students unlearn the tendency to think individually and instead practice quick, synchronized teamwork, overcoming hesitation and rigid responses. These activities foster a shift from traditional, static learning approaches to more dynamic, collaborative, and reflective methods, where students actively unlearn old habits and engage with new ways of understanding and applying knowledge.

Unlearning the learned

We all try to be grammar Nazis and in the process of being so, we often commit more mistakes, slips, and errors. “I am due to meet the boss, aren’t I?” And we start justifying “This is what I have been taught? The development of the phrase Aren’t I is a placement for the slang “ain’t”.

The revised sentence

I am due to meet the boss, am I not?

Is grammatically correct and attempts to listen out for the faulty aren't I and replace it unlearning the Queen's English with am I not?

It is necessary to remember that we cannot speak and write all pure and sanitized sentences.

So let us try to unlearn erroneous grammar

Please find attached my resume for your perusal

I had been waiting for the article to finish

The yoga guru looks sober

In Queen's English. Sober means somber: in the United States it refers to a non-drunk person.

It's not just the extra "o's" and "u's" one needs to eliminate from the vocabulary (neighbor vs. neighbor); one needs to get rid of passive voice, convoluted sentences, and flowery language.

It is necessary to use language that treats all people with respect and consideration regardless of age, race, caste, religion, or gender. Expressions change, may not be suitable next year. May not satisfy everyone. Changing our language usage does not come easily or automatically. So, this paper calls for an "unlearning" and a "rethinking of biased language and gender-blind management education to critically scrutinize and enable a consciousness-raising in ourselves in our use of language.

Learning assertiveness

There is no curriculum for unlearning, and, of course, in many ways, it's simply learning to see things differently or to at least be open to it. Pokemon strategy reflects one may not be able to tidily group people into styles, but you can try to catch them all by appealing to all the senses and using a variety of methods. An assertive "no" is not a direct dismissal of the other person's request or demand: It's an articulation of your own feelings and/or interests. So, assertiveness can be defined as an emotionally intelligent way of having your things met, it takes into account your thoughts. Ideas, feelings as well as those of the other party for mutual benefit. One needs to learn to say 'no':

I am sorry but I will see my friend helps you.

I appreciate the invitation, but I can't make it this time.

So the challenge is not learning what to say. But unlearning all of the emotional stuff that prevents healthy transactions. Various classroom situations can be created where the participants can learn the differences in the assertive. Passive and aggressive style of communication. Further, how to develop assertive skills by learning to say 'no', learning to use "I" and "We" statements, and using the appropriate body language can be demonstrated for strategic learning.

Transactional analysis

Transactional Analysis examines the social transactions we make with one another daily. The introduction of the TA Exercise Involves two aspects. unlearning to disregard other people's viewpoints. This is to increase one's ability to relate to and empathize with other people, by trying to get you to take a point of view other than one's own. Second, to realize that all inter-personal communications have two elements:

The verbal message

The non-verbal cues (body language) that accompany the verbal message. Here the Rogerian concept of "mirroring" comes into play. To engage in effective communication, one must both listen to the message and pay attention to the messenger. Therefore, one must remember that talking without listening is unproductive and talking without looking is also unproductive. We also learn, from how other people react to us which is also called "Feedback". We try to get people to talk about themselves, so they encourage statements like "I feel. I think", over statements like "People feel", or "People do". TA specifies different types of "feedback". When someone pays attention to us and gives us feedback it is known as "stroking". We receive different types of strokes: Positive Strokes which make one feel good and Negative Strokes which make one feel bad. Although most stroking goes on at the verbal level, non-verbal gestures such as touching can also contribute to stroking. Positive and Negative strokes can also be described as Conditional: Receiving a stroke for what we do

"You did a great job on your live project assignment

That was the worst report I have ever read

and Unconditional: Receiving a stroke for who we are

"You are a sincere student

"True never seen such a stupid boy"

Sometimes, we behave in a specific way designed to elicit a specific type of stroke from others. If we want to improve our relationships with other people. TA teaches two things: First, we can seek out ways to give more unconditional positive strokes so others know how we feel about them as people. Secondly, we can listen carefully to the strokes others give us to determine if their praise is for who we are or what we do.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper underscores the importance of integrating emotional intelligence (EI) competencies into teaching and learning practices as a unique and transformative tool for enhancing communication and collaboration. As communication practices evolve, fostering EI skills such as empathy, self-awareness, self-control, optimism, and initiative becomes essential for effective teaching. By engaging with interactive and dynamic activities—such as the Literary Riddles, Finger Method for Mastering Articles, and Pick, Pack, Bang—students not only strengthen their understanding of academic content but also develop critical emotional and communicative competencies. These games create

opportunities for students to practice teamwork, quick decision-making, and reflective thinking, thereby facilitating the development of positive emotional exchanges in both academic and work environments. Integrating EQ skills into classroom settings at all educational levels helps improve not only individual emotional engagement but also enhances collective collaboration. By focusing on EI, we can cultivate a more emotionally intelligent approach to communication that fosters effective team-based cooperation, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment.

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