A new decade for social changes
The Theatre of Mind: An educational tool of teaching Emotional Intelligence via ICTs and distant learning

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to provide a different approach in the educational process, introducing “The Theatre of Mind” - a term that we use instead of the term tabletop Role Playing Games (tRPGs)- as a powerful interdisciplinary educational tool with a view to cultivating and developing the emotional intelligence of students. According to this approach, my intention is to indicate how the use of the Theatre of Mind in the educational environment can be an integral asset; not only in teaching school’s subjects (ex. Language, History, Physics etc.) but also in teaching behavior, culture, ideals, and ethical values. Therefore, it aims at student’s mental and emotional stimulation targeting the integration of mental and emotional process emphasizing the latter. Thus, the Theatre of Mind may provoke and develop concrete emotions, manners and behavior through simulating real life. It is a method that may provide a unique experience for the student. Concluding, I suggest that the Theatre of Mind due to its nature and by means of a special design can function as the field where learners will deal with a holistic cultural experience monitoring and developing emotional intelligence even in distant learning.

Keywords. Theatre of Mind, cultivate, teaching, Emotional Intelligence, distant learning

1 Introduction
“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all” Aristotle vigorously supported approximately 2000 years ago.

Education plays a crucial role in our lives but the question that arises is what education can offer to the students besides cognitive knowledge. John Dewey (1897) notes: “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” It is an integral part of our lives. We learn since we are born and definitely till we die. We learn the world around us, we experience and we act according to our knowledge, according to our emotions or both.

Emotions are present in every aspect of our lives and consequently in the process of learning. The appearance and the popularity of the term “Emotional Intelligence” the last few decades, has intrigued the scientific community and a handful of researches have been conducted concerning the potentiality of teaching and learning it as it seems to be one of the most significant factors for someone’s success in life.
Accordingly, there is a necessity to emphasize on students’ ability to acknowledge and control their emotions, to cultivate their imagination, creativity and critical thinking as a means to build their personality and handle actively the knowledge that school provide for their lives. Thus, there is an inevitable need for a rearrangement of the educational goals. Learning has to be active, interactive, and should highpoint to the cultivation of one’s Emotional Intelligence.

As Kurt Lewin (1951) states: "Learning is more effective when it is an active rather than a passive process." Games naturally provide this aspect of learning. In this context, the focus of attention should be on the importance of using games in the educational process.

The use of games in education is a misinterpreted field, by most, due to the fact that playing games is associated with a pleasant recess from the school’s curriculum. Many educators, though, use educational games in their classroom in order to facilitate the conduction of the teaching process.

The issues that are raised in this paper are:

a. The existence or not of Emotional Intelligence (E.I.) in the education
b. Is it possible to teach E.I. and if yes can it be taught effectively

c. How the Theatre of Mind can be adjusted as an appropriate tool to develop and improve E.I. and

d. How it can function as a distant learning tool with the use of the suitable platform.

2 Emotional Intelligence
2.1 Brief history, Definitions and Models

There are multiple definitions and a plethora of Emotional Intelligence’s models that have been proposed throughout the last few decades. Naturally, the concept has been established and has a gradual evolvement due to the fact that many scientific studies and researches are being conducted.

A general consensus appears on the fact that Emotional Intelligence is an inextricable part of numerous aspects of life. There are different models that focus on mental abilities, mixed mental abilities and personality traits, mixed models which set out a mental ability conception of Emotional Intelligence, a description of personality and its characteristics that might accompany such intelligence (Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2000).

The term was first popularized by the success of Daniel Goleman’s book “Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ” (1995). Goleman defined emotional intelligence or “EQ” as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (Goleman 1998, p.317).

However, in 1937 the pioneering term of “social intelligence” by Thorndike and Stein allowed Wechsler in 1940 to distinct one’s abilities into cognitive and non-cognitive. Few years later, in 1983, Gardner wrote about “multiple intelligence” and that led Salovey and Mayer, in 1990 to refer to the “Emotional Intelligence” (Cherniss,2000)

The term “Emotional intelligence” was coined in 1990 by Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey. In 1997, they defined it including the following four different abilities:

- the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion;
- the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought;
- the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge;
- the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

(Salovey and Mayer 1997, p.10)
Goleman subsequently identified five “social and emotional competencies” which characterize emotional intelligence (Goleman 1998, p. 318). These are:

- Self-awareness: Being alert to your feelings
- Self-regulation: Managing your feelings
- Motivation: Using feelings to help achieve your goals
- Empathy: Tuning into how others feel
- Social skills: Handling feelings well in interactions with others

Nonetheless, recently, A. Drigas and C. Papoutsi (2018) presented a different perspective providing a nine-layered pyramid model that demonstrates the levels a human must pass to reach the upper level of Emotional Intelligence. The specific model is based on an emotional-cognitive approach while highlights hierarchically the required abilities and traits for the highest layer of the pyramid. From the lowest to the topmost level are: Emotional stimuli, emotion recognition, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness—empathy—the discrimination of emotions, social skills—expertise, self—Actualization—universality of emotions, transcendence and emotional unity. It is a well-rounded model and illustrates clearly the stages of Emotional Intelligence as it helps to understand in depth the necessity of E.I.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper, since it has been thoroughly examined, I will rely on the four-branch hierarchical ability model (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, 2001). In this model, Emotional Intelligence is best described as the ability to perceive or recognize emotions, to use emotions to facilitate thought, to understand emotional information, and to manage emotions in oneself and others (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

Resultantly, emotional Intelligence has a strong presence in the scientific community and it seems a promising field and a significant acquirement of a person either it is innate or not. Therefore, its cultivation and development are paramount and as it seems rest on a basis that can be achieved through self-awareness and awareness of others. The question that is raised at this point is what education can offer in order to accomplish these and by which means.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence and Education

Aristotle, in his work Nicomachean Ethics (1st Book), postulated the meaning and highlighted the significance of emotions and specifically to their role in the learning process and the conquest of ‘eudaimonia’—a state of bliss.

Without a doubt, emotions in both learning and teaching had a strong presence in ancient times and it is promising that recently many psychologists and scientists of education keep an interest to this extensive, indeed, field of research.

As a matter of fact, the last few years, there has been an augmentation of interest in the role of Emotional Intelligence in education. Nonetheless, Emotional Intelligence in schools has been controversial and a challenging component due to the traditional “rationalist” direction of education.

Alan Mortiboys (2005, p.14) exemplifies the most likely reason about this rationalistic direction by pointing out the famous quotation of Rene Descartes “I think therefore I am”. Specifically, refers that the latter stated that “each of us has a ‘mental’ realm within us which is uncontaminated by the sensual nature of the body. This separate realm of the mind was seen as ‘higher’ than the faculties of the body, which was closer to animal nature.” Accordingly, the perception about “rationalism” which has prevailed, leaves behind the field of emotions.
Nevertheless, in his book “Descartes’ Error”, Antonio Damasio indicated that, from a neuroscientist’s perspective, Descartes was wrong. (Damasio 1996: xv). Emotions can’t be separated from thoughts.

2.3 The importance of E.I. in education

The importance of the emotions in education and especially in the learning and teaching process lies on the fact that primarily we all are human beings and we are overwhelmed by emotions (aside from some specific situations) that are an inseparable part of our personality, character and existence. How can we be parts of a process that requires interaction and active involvement without considering the emotions? We can effortlessly ratiocinate that Emotional Intelligence is present in our lives. Emotions are omnipresent in every aspect of our lives.

2.4 Is it feasible to teach Emotional Intelligence?

Goleman and Boyatzis (2017) support that emotional competence is a learned capability based on Emotional Intelligence.

There have been some attempts through plentiful programs for the enhancement of some aspects of E.I. Specifically there are the SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) programs that provide help to adolescents who tackle manifold problems.

In his paper Yeager (2017) attempts to find the most effective SEL program for different age groups. He also highlights that the aim of these programs is for adolescents to feel respected by adults and peers and to gain status and admiration in the eyes of people whose opinions they value.

Likewise, according to the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2003a) the findings were remarkable due to the fact that they showed that Emotional Intelligence can be improved in aspects such as assertiveness, empathy, self-regard and emotion management.

The appropriate attention to Emotional Intelligence and the steps to follow in order to eventually acquire it, should be the first and foremost prepossession of the Educational curriculum regardless the cognitive knowledge which is provided anyway.

It is a necessity for educators and students to acquire the components of Emotional Intelligence for various reasons. All studies and researches that have been conducted concerning this topic have indicated that if a person holds a high percentage of Emotional Intelligence, he/she has a success their life. Specifically, as V. K. Chechi (2012) supports “people who are emotionally adept -who know and manage their own feelings well and who read and deal effectively with other people’s feelings will be at an advantage in any domain of life”.

Recent research (Hassan N., Jani M. H.S., Som M.R., Hamid A. Z. N., Azizam A. N., 2015) drew the conclusion after their findings that the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and teaching effectiveness among lecturers to their University was vital. The role of the educator includes the conformation of students’ personality aiming to create complete individuals providing them with the appropriate tools towards facing life’s difficulties. Since emotions are paramount, the educator must use his emotional intelligence while teaching and simultaneously attempt teaching it.

“Emotional Intelligence is especially important for teachers as it helps them face certain stressful situations in which their actions can impact their students’ learning and well-being.” (Coombe C., Bouslama F., Hiasat L., Medina C., Manser R., 2020)
2.5 The need
Since emotions and feelings seem to play a cardinal role in education, in this paper I suggest the use of Role Playing Games as a basis of a game especially addressed to help students improve and develop their Emotional Intelligence and by extension their personality based on the aforementioned definitions and models.

Firstly, I will briefly mention a brief description of what tabletop Role Playing Games are, their nature and further I will delineate their extended concept as the Theatre of Mind which is proposed as a tool particularly for the educational procedure.

3 The theatre of mind
3.1 The Foundation-Tabletop Role Playing Games- a brief description
Tabletop Role Playing Games, henceforth abbreviated as tRPGs, are an entire genre of games focused on creative storytelling and player interaction. They were initially created on the form of a tabletop game played by a group of friends, one of whom acts as the storyteller, commonly referred to as Dungeon Master, or Game Master in the more recent iterations, and a group of players who each embodies a specific character created either by them as part of the experience or pre-generated characters assigned to them by the Game Master (GM). They are based on a certain set of rules and guidelines and the engaged players assume the roles of characters that have already been placed spatiotemporally in a fictional setting. The players are responsible for acting out these roles within a narrative acting or through a process of structured decision-making or character development. The actions may succeed or fail depending on the system of rules, the dice and the description of the actions.

“Role-Playing-Game is getting together with some friends to write a story. It's joining around a campfire or dining room to spin some tall tales. It is being creative and having fun with friends.” (Jerry Stratton)

3.2 Definition
The Theatre of Mind will be a unique and pioneering educational Role-Playing Game, is inspired and based on the basic rules and the mechanisms of the tabletop Role Playing Games, yet, with substantial differences. Albeit it shall be a game that has rules and specific mechanisms; the Theatre of Mind is about defining specific cognitive aims (depending among others- on the taught subject) and developing the student’s Emotional Intelligence. This entails shaping strong personalities and minds through the use of student’s creativity and imagination. Consequently, I strongly believe that it could be an applicable interdisciplinary, cross-subject educational tool.

3.3 How and why is this term selected?
The Theatre of Mind is a term that has been generated by some tRPG players as it straightforwardly describes the nature of tabletop Role Playing Games. It is a term that I incorporated and chose to use in my current proposed idea. The reason why I selected this term is because of the nature of the game. The Theatre of Mind is suggested as an educational game by way of a different standpoint, focusing on interaction, acting, emotions and behavioral management.

3.4 The nature
The Theatre of Mind will be heavily focused on interaction and acting, it can simulate the experience of any aspect of life and it can provoke a variety of reactions. This
characterization as “Theatre” has well-founded documentation. Since someone is involved with this game is experiencing conditions similar to the improvised theatre. There are protagonists, antagonists, sub-plots, conflicts, climaxes, anti-climaxes and everything that is related to everyday situations.

As in improvisational theatrical plays the actor can improvise depending on the other actors’ action, students improvise and decide the flow of the game depending on the interaction of other students and those of the storyteller. What is performed is created at that moment spontaneously. In its unadulterated form, the dialogue, the action, the story and the characters are created through collaboration among the players as the improvisation unfolds.

3.5 The operation
3.5.1 Character creation
The setting of the game starts by the creation of a character for each student who forms a representation of their character. Each character has a set of characteristics that are listed on a special-purpose form called a “character sheet”. Each player has to decide how the character is going to be built and to state the full name, the age of their character, its outward appearance, occupation, hobbies and many of the characteristics that a person might have. In addition, each student has to write a background story of the embodied character. Nevertheless, the character sheet can also be pre-generated by the storyteller.

3.5.2 The educator’s role
The educator will play a critical role in the progression of a game. He is will be the storyteller and as such he partially determines the flow of the game; he leads the story to specific “paths” where he can elicit knowledge, values and he can provoke emotions and attitudes. The game can be played as a series of adventures, or it can be a recreation of events from literature, history or science.

Each scene will be described by the educator and then, after a pause the students will decide how their characters will react. It is therefore a game of acting, as each player is required to embody their character in every situation.

During the game the educator embodies and controls all the auxiliary characters that help the flow of the story if the learners get stuck. These characters are called NPCs (Non-Player Characters). Nevertheless, he never intervenes, he is the mediator to an autonomous learning and he is obliged to attempt to activate the self-acting of the student. The educator may arbitrarily decide if the action described is a success depending on the level of the student’s description in the current situation as well as keeping in mind how the outcome will add to the drama in progress. Moreover, he is a collaborator, a consultant but he is not a leading expert.

It is the role of the educator, in any educational process, to be determinant since it is important to trigger the students. The latter may develop their critical thought, accept others’ opinions and the educator must exhort them not to resist new ideas.

The students will affect the entire game world, leaving behind their mark as autonomous individuals. From the beginning, they will assume a character and they will act depending on their character abilities and skills. They can keep notes or even have a diary of each session in order to help them remember every detail of the story.

3.5.3 The duration
The duration of the Theatre of Mind can be up to 100 hours per year. Its complexity requires devotion of time during the lessons along with personal involvement. Here lays the difference of this game contrary to the games that are used presently in education.

3.5.4 The Objectives of an ongoing Theatre of Mind campaign emphasizing on Emotions

It is essential to be mentioned that it is vital for the educator to set clear educational objectives. Classification of the objectives is a time-consuming procedure but it is the cornerstone for a successful teaching. According to Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy (1956), the educational objectives are divided into three main domains:

- Cognitive: Which is referred to the mental skills (knowledge)
- Affective: Which is about growth in feelings or emotional areas (attitude or self)
- Psychomotor: Which is referred to manual or physical skills (skills)

However, in this paper I will deal with the second domain which includes the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes. (Krathwohl, Bloom, Masia, 1973) Krathwohl’s affective domain taxonomy is conceivably the best known of any of the affective taxonomies. "The taxonomy is ordered according to the principle of internalization. Internalization refers to the process whereby a person's affect toward an object passes from a general awareness level to a point where the affect is 'internalized' and consistently guides or controls the person's behavior (Seels & Glasgow, 1990, p. 28)."

The taxonomy is presented in five phases:

- Receiving describes the stage of being aware of or being sensitive to the existence of certain ideas, material, or phenomena and being willing to tolerate them. Examples include: to differentiate, to accept, to listen and to respond to.
- Responding describes the second stage of the taxonomy and refers to a commitment in some small measure to the ideas, materials, or phenomena involved by actively responding to them. Examples are: to comply with, to follow, to commend, to volunteer, to spend leisure time in, to acclaim.
- Valuing means being willing to be perceived by others as valuing certain ideas, materials, or phenomena. Examples include: to increase measured proficiency in, to relinquish, to subsidize, to support, to debate.
- Organization is the fourth stage of Krathwohl’s taxonomy and involves relating the new value to those one already holds and bringing it into a harmonious and internally consistent philosophy. Examples are: to discuss, to theorize, to formulate, to balance, and to examine.
- Characterization by value or value set means acting consistently in accordance with the values the individual has internalized. Examples include: to revise, to require, being rated high in the value, to avoid, resisting, managing, to resolve.

It is my belief that this domain should be the one that deserves the utmost attention from educators. Students may acquire a plethora of skills and abilities through the use of this game; they have the opportunity to learn and to control most of the aforementioned categories.
Similarly, the Theatre of Mind could provide to students with a multitude of skills and abilities in both a cognitive and an emotional level. Learners can cultivate their skills, their emotions and by extent their personality. They can increase their:

- Observation, comparison, classification and hypothesis skills
- Problem generalization, solution finding and their contrivance of solutions
- Behavioral evaluation, investigation and prediction skills

Likewise, they can also evolve in finding spatiotemporal connections; they can learn how to compare facts and to formulate inductive and productive syllogisms. Furthermore, they:

- learn how to interact and grow their interpersonal relationships and initiatives
- learn how to conduct a productive and constructive discussion
- determine their co operational abilities and learn how to manage disagreements and juxtapositions.
- increase their capacity to conduct a research and settle problematic situations
- learn how to configure evaluation criteria, grow their critical thinking and be decision-makers

Summarizing, the Theatre of Mind can be used as a tool to elicit, trigger and monitor the emotions, behaviors and attitudes –among others– of the student. The educator can and should encourage the cultivation and the development of his Emotional Intelligence.

Additionally, the educator through an in-depth organization of both short-term and long-term goals and objectives that concern the Emotional Intelligence can motivate the students to attain significant skills and abilities that they may acquire in real life, earlier.

4 ICTs, distant learning and the theatre of mind

Regarding the information age era we should underline in, the role of ICTs in general and special education and in various related domains [35-46, 70-85]. The mobiles play an important role [25-34] in making more accessible the educational procedures. The serious games make the educational applications more attractive to students and pupils [65-69]. The artificial intelligence is a powerful tool in procedures for diagnosis and adaptable interventions and moreover in design of adaptable educational applications [60-64]. Finally there are several applications that support educational procedures based on metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation strategies [47-59, 86-101].

All the above mentioned applications of information age era, facilitate and accelerate both the educational procedures and the assessment and diagnosis as well as the intervention and rehabilitation procedures within education. All the educational procedures could take a big advantage of all these applications and facilities as already has been presented in this article and this is a very promising situation.

The most recent situation of the pandemic Covid-19 coerced students worldwide into a new era of learning. Presently, distant learning has been an indispensable part of everyone’s life and the only way of an interactive and active learning.

The Theatre of Mind as an educational tool it would unquestionably function as a distant learning means due to the flexibility of its nature and mechanisms, running via and exploiting the above presented information age era services.

Nowadays, the online platforms either for boardgames or platforms that facilitate the communication between people flourish. RPG players around the world use platforms with various services (rolling a dice, instant messages, video, share screen, create riddles etc) that
facilitate and make the game feasible even if they are not gathered with physical presence. That offers new characteristics and make the players more creative and the games more intriguing.

Likewise, the Theatre of Mind could be highly productive, useful and may offer the dedication of a student that no other tool or teaching technique could provide. The vast majority of youngsters are extremely familiar with the use of an electronic device and the social media. Hence, with the appropriate training of educators, the Theatre of Mind may facilitate the process of distant learning. It could be a functional and enjoyable experience and provide great means to accomplish all the aforementioned educational and emotional goals.

5 Conclusion
Concluding, I recommend a different perspective on teaching and the development of the student’s Emotional Intelligence through the use of the Theatre of Mind.

Taking into account the lack of regard, concerning the development of the Emotional Intelligence, there is a need for a proper system to be implemented in the educational system; a system that will focus on providing students with the necessary equipment to develop their Emotional Intelligence and simultaneously their cognitive knowledge.

Education should be a process that allows and guides students to develop their cravings, critical thinking, empathy, and alignment towards knowledge for sensible action.

Self-cultivation and growth of personality should be the purpose of education. Therefore, Emotional Intelligence is of utmost importance. It provides students with the ability to manage their emotions, their feelings and it allows them to handle and comprehend the emotions and feelings of their peers.

The application of the Theatre of Mind in the educational process would be a unique experience for the student. The students and the educator create a story together. The classroom is transformed into a parallel world in which students play their character’s lives facing simulations of real-life situations and tackling any problems that may appear during the story. This provides the opportunity to be prepared for a plethora of occasions that they might find themselves into in real life.

Moreover, whilst experiencing an ongoing scenario for an extended period of time the students will have the opportunity to bond with their character and hence to develop their personality in every level. Allowing a cultivation and understanding of themselves in terms of being a part of an integrated field of relationships is the key to the evolution of a mature individual. Experience seems to be indissolubly connected with emotions.

As relationships flourish, they provide students with the strength to gain deeper knowledge of the surrounding environment, making them take more educated decisions and manipulate their lives by adjusting and altering their emotional development. The Theatre of Mind naturally supports the emotional development. It can allow freedom and self-acting to the students.

Lastly, due to the flexible nature of the game, it is adaptable in any environment either this is a classroom or a virtual one. Undoubtedly, education’s duty has to be the development and the improvement of students’ Emotional Intelligence and simultaneously to produce creative, ethical and critical thinking minds in any circumstances.

6 References


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