Entry

Developing the Socio-Emotional Intelligence of Doctoral Students

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Definition: Socio-emotional intelligence is the capacity to consider emotions, intuition, and cognition to identify, manage and express emotions and to respond to social situations with authenticity, openness and fairness. By doing so, individuals will achieve a sense of wellbeing and build meaningful relations whilst having a positive impact on the environment, others and themselves. The term doctoral student refers to a postgraduate researcher completing a doctoral degree. Supervisor is the term used in academia for an academic guiding and supporting the doctoral student. Doctoral supervisions usually include at least two academics as supervisors. A doctoral degree in the UK normally focuses on the in-depth study of a topic; these can be chosen by the doctoral student or sometimes be content-specific if a scholarship is attached.

Keywords: socio-emotional intelligence; doctoral students; supervisors; psychological safety; doctoral journey

1. Introduction

A doctoral journey can be isolating and one where doctoral students will have to navigate complex issues, sometimes unknown to themselves. This can affect their confidence and self-esteem, as they doubt their abilities or sense of self. Although doctoral students are normally guided by their supervisor, a lot of their time will be spent by themselves, which can be lonely and negatively impact their wellbeing. Research has shown that the mental health and wellbeing of doctoral students are a growing concern [1].

To support them effectively, early intervention strategies should be considered [1]. A focus on developing doctoral students' socio-emotional intelligence (SEI) through a series of interventions and through the relationships they develop with their supervisor/s can be helpful to enable doctoral students to flourish and thrive. This entry explores SEI within the context of doctoral supervision in the UK and the interventions that can have a positive impact on the doctoral student's SEI development.

It will first explore SEI from a theoretical standpoint and then focus on ways doctoral students can develop their SEI whilst completing their doctoral studies. It is important to highlight that SEI in doctoral students is an emerging field of study, and, therefore, there is a lack of research in the subject. Consequently, some of the literature presented in this entry has been collected from other areas of higher education provision, or different fields of study.

2. Background to Socio-Emotional Intelligence

Socio-emotional intelligence is distinct from previous definitions of emotional intelligence and social intelligence. It identifies both elements as interrelated and inseparable, because all emotions are expressed based on an individual's socio-cultural experiences with others. Additionally, social interactions will always instigate an emotion. By integrating both concepts, individuals move away from self-centred intentions toward a shared understanding of what it means to be human [2,3]. Additionally, seeing it holistically allows

individuals to exist with an embodied relational understanding [2]. In this way, they are using their knowledge (head) to inform their practice (hand) and how they feel (heart) [2].

Nevertheless, to gain an in-depth understanding of this term, it is important to dissect it by analysing each of its components.

2.1. Intelligence

Early philosophers saw intelligence as multifaceted, for example, Aristotle [4], who saw it as three things, theoretical, practical and productive, or Kant [5–7], who referred to pure reason, practical reason and judgement, much like contemporary theorists. However, the traditional view of intelligence up until the early part of the 20th century was the idea that it was a quantifiable fixed asset for accumulating knowledge [3]. Bartholomew [8] refers to this period as the "straitjacket imposed by the psychometric approach", with a focus on numbering and rating intelligence in a quantifiable manner.

More recently, the understanding of intelligence has gone back to seeing it as something that has different facets, with theorists such as Gardner [9] identifying types of intelligence and seeing intelligence as something that can be developed and learned [10].

2.2. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence was defined by Salovey and Mayer [11] as a set of skills that help people to understand and express emotions in themselves and others. They saw it as something that could be measured, a view that is now contested by many researchers when referring to both emotional intelligence and intelligence. Similarly, Goleman [12] and Brackett et al. [13] saw emotional intelligence as an ability to understand and manage emotions for emotional growth, with Goleman adding that it was also an ability to understand and manage relationships [12].

2.3. Social Intelligence

Social intelligence was first defined by Thorndike in the 1920s [14] as an ability to understand and manage others. However, Wechsler [15] disregarded social intelligence in favour of his IQ test, viewing social intelligence as part of general intelligence but applied to social situations. The term was neglected until the 1980s when Cantor and Kilstrom [16] redefined it as an understanding of the social world. Albreght [17] went further and created a model of social intelligence, which he called SPACE:

- Situational awareness;
- Presence;
- Authenticity;
- Clarity;
- Empathy.

More recently, Goleman [18] divided social intelligence into social awareness (sensing) and social facility (acting). In his view, social intelligence and emotional intelligence, although a dual notion, are intertwined. Although theorists agree that social and emotional intelligence are linked, they still see each as distinct [9,12,18,19]. Rather than seeing social and emotional intelligence as separate forms of intelligence, it may be more appropriate to see 'socio-emotional intelligence' as one of the many facets of intelligence [2]. This entry will apply the term socio-emotional intelligence in this way.

The reasons for this are multiple. A person's emotions are expressed based on their environment, background and socio-cultural upbringing and, therefore, are social [2,3,12,18]. Additionally, every social situation is informed by their emotions and can trigger an emotional response. Consequently, emotional intelligence and social intelligence must be considered in unity.

3. Contemporary View of Socio-Emotional Intelligence

Socio-emotional intelligence is a relatively new term, with Devis-Rozental first coining it in 2013 and then defining it thoroughly as distinct from emotional intelligence and social

intelligence in 2017 [20]. This definition of SEI is distinctive because it specifically refers to making a positive impact on our environment, others and ourselves. By specifying the social responsibility aspect within the definition, the criticism that emotional intelligence can be a negative trait that people can use to manipulate others is no longer valid [1]. An example of this type of criticism was made by Nagler et al. [21].

In their study, which explored the "dark side" of SEI, they discussed how psychopaths and narcissists would use their emotional intelligence for malicious reasons. Making SEI merely self-serving would, therefore, have negative connotations. However, by linking it to social responsibility in the need to have a positive impact on those around us, as well as on ourselves, this self-serving idea is mitigated [2,3].

Areas of Socio-Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness is the basis for developing SEI as individuals learn about themselves and can then identify other areas easier. The other areas identified in the literature [2,3] are:

- Motivation;
- Empathy;
- Social awareness;
- Managing emotions;
- Self-compassion.

4. Socio-Emotional Intelligence in Doctoral Students

The literature on the socio-emotional aspects of completing a doctoral programme is scarce, with most perspectives exploring the intellectual process of the doctoral journey [22].

Still, Barry et al. [23] found that some of the most challenging aspects of completing a doctorate, as reported by doctoral students, were self-management, motivation and other "soft skills". With 40–60% of doctoral students not completing their studies [24], these may be important skills that will impact their doctoral journey and, therefore, should be accounted for. This is not to say that other issues such as finances, family circumstances, life changes and other aspects are not important considerations when looking at a lack of completion; nevertheless, having socio-emotional intelligence skills will also have an impact on how these will be managed and should, therefore, be accounted for.

During their learning journey, doctoral students will have to encounter situations where they will have to practice skills such as networking, negotiating, processing feedback, experiencing rejection, presenting their work and sometimes managing difficult relationships. They should be given opportunities to develop their self-awareness, motivation, resilience and engagement to give them further tools to support them in completing their studies and, to an extent, support them with wellbeing issues they may face [1].

All these areas sit within the SEI umbrella [2,3] and should, therefore, be seen as an integral part of a programme of development for doctoral students, because if they have developed these skills, they will be more likely to succeed in their studies. Many of the doctoral students entering a programme of study will already have an array of SEI skills. Some of these skills will further develop as students go through each of the milestones, depending on their experiences. They will learn some from their supervisors, for example, how to deal with difficult questions, how to handle rejection or how to be assertive. They will also gain some of these skills whilst completing the practical aspects of their programme [2].

For example, they will have to manage their time to meet deadlines and practice presentation and communication skills during their oral presentations and exams, if they have any. Ideally, there should be explicit opportunities within a curriculum for doctoral students to develop and practice their SEI within a safe environment. This would enrich their experience and give them additional tools to complete their studies successfully, not regardless of their mental health and wellbeing, but accounting for it as an important aspect.

5. Strategies to Develop Socio-Emotional Intelligence in Doctoral Students

5.1. A Positive Welcome with Early Interventions

The ways in which students are welcomed, recognised and valued by the institution and their supervisors are key to the development of students' self-esteem [2]. Additionally, understanding doctoral students' aspirations and how they are motivated are also important for fostering their SEI development [2]. To achieve this, students suggest that universities should ensure that all aspects of the programme are ready, so students feel confident in their programme of study [2]. This will also help to ensure doctoral students can effectively plan their journey, accounting for other aspects of their life.

Supervisors should aim to develop a human-centred attitude from the beginning to provide a solid platform for effective and meaningful relationships with their doctoral students [25]. In a doctoral programme, students' wellbeing should be at the centre of practice, considering safety, codes of conduct and a comprehensive programme of study where students can develop their knowledge and research skills. Collegiality should be fostered, and institutions and doctoral colleges should attempt to break the 'them and us' culture by emphasising that both supervisors and doctoral students are intellectual peers in the learning journey, both learning from each other [26]. There should also be opportunities for engaging doctoral students in developing their academic and professional identity.

Schmidt and Hansson [27] propose a more student-centred approach in order to meet doctoral students' needs and support them in enhancing their wellbeing. This, as an early intervention, can have a positive impact on their future role as academics. In the UK, the doctoral journey is distinct from other types of study. It has a more personalised approach with close contact with supervisors. It may have a group cohort, but most of the work required will be conducted through self-directed studying, which can be quite isolating [1]. Ensuring doctoral students are clear on how their doctoral programme will run, even before they start, can influence their engagement and motivation [2].

A lack of clarity of what is expected of them can produce anxiety and make doctoral students feel unprepared for the various milestones they will have to complete throughout their studies. Consequently, an introductory programme that clearly signposts to the right information and support should be developed, which would support students in developing their SEI, as they may feel more confident and able to go through their doctoral journey [2]. This would also help them manage the institution's recognised milestones within their programme, such as their annual progress, any oral examination or the final defence of their thesis.

5.2. Learning with Others

Humans are social beings wired to connect. Social learning is a powerful way of developing skills and learning from each other [28]. Doctoral programmes are known for being lonely experiences, with doctoral students reporting isolation and lack of community [1]. Ensuring that there are opportunities for doctoral students to be in a group and learn from others is important. There are programmes that, as well as the traditional supervisor–student relationship, include cohort activities where doctoral students can have peer learning opportunities and time to get to know other doctoral students in their university. This can be useful to engage and support doctoral students. By working alongside others, albeit in their own doctoral subject, students may develop a sense of belonging as they feel part of something bigger.

Creating structured weekly opportunities for doctoral students to learn together will also enable them to gain valuable skills and to practice amongst peers, thus becoming more confident [2]. Being able to share their experiences and identify how these are similar or different will enable doctoral students to practice SEI areas such as empathy, social engagement and emotion regulation.

Additionally, informal interactions and exchanges can shape academic identity. Social learning can also be useful for developing communication skills by completing presentations or having to synthesise their area of study. Being able to articulate what they are

doing to different types of audiences will help doctoral students develop confidence in their abilities and in the way they convey their messages.

Opportunities to present their work in different mediums, such as to attend conferences, symposiums and other types of academic activities, can be helpful for this. Vygotsky [28], a Russian psychologist, developed the notion of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the space between what individuals can do by themselves and what they can do with the help of a more knowledgeable other. Previously, Devis-Rozental [2] has argued that the 'other' does not have to be a more knowledgeable person but someone who has different knowledge or perspectives. In this way, it is not about quantifying the amount of knowledge, but highlighting the social aspect of the learning process. This may happen between supervisors and doctoral students, but it can also happen between doctoral students. In this instance, it may be that a doctoral student learns from another how to present their work, how to do something for their course or even how to navigate aspects of the doctoral program gained through their own lived experience [2].

5.3. An Effective Relationship between Supervisors and Doctoral Students

The relationship between doctoral students and their supervisors is key to ensuring the students' success [29]. Marino [30] found that having an academic who cared about students, motivated them, inspired them and, importantly, encouraged them to achieve was key to their success. Cornwall et al. [31] found that with the support of a caring academic, engagement in the students they surveyed more than doubled, as did their odds of thriving in all aspects of their wellbeing. Their study found that the doctoral student–supervisor relationship is shifting from a previously hierarchical relationship to a more collaborative peer learning journey. This, they say, could be due to various changes in student and staff demographics, amongst other things.

A sound doctoral journey experience is influenced by supportive supervisors, who guide the doctoral student beyond their programme of study. If their chosen field is academia, and they go on to supervise students, their supervisory style will be influenced by how they were supervised, which could be positive or negative [29]. Nevertheless, there must be clear boundaries and a professional attitude within these relationships to avoid confusion [29].

A supervisor's own attitude can influence students. For example, in a study looking at developing socio-emotional intelligence in higher education, students reported that academics often do not realise the impact they can have on students' SEI and how by supporting students holistically, students will achieve their best [2].

Supervisors, although not completely responsible for it, have a role in supporting doctoral students' persistence and wellbeing. In her study, Posselt [32] found that when supervisors normalised struggle and failure whilst promoting a growth mindset, doctoral students felt that their experience was more meaningful.

Academics influence students' development of socio-emotional intelligence, and it starts by building effective relationships [2,26]. In a study, students reported that an academic who role-modelled prosocial behaviours and impacted the way students felt about themselves was an important aspect of their learning journey [1]. If SEI is developed in academia through role-modelling the behaviours and attitudes doctoral students should have to thrive as they develop their academic identity and successfully complete their programme, it is important that supervisors are aware of this and of how their behaviour will influence and impact students.

The types of things that supervisors role model could include resilience, motivation, engagement and self-awareness. Still, supervisors need to be aware that their own behaviour impacts their doctoral students. A recent study found that academics understand the impact they can have on students' SEI. For instance, one asserted: "we are about transforming people... modelling it SEI... sharing the possibilities" [2] (p. 167/68). Another academic added "whenever we are teachers we should be role models, so we should be

able to role-model the kinds of relationships that we would want our students to be able to have themselves" [2] (p. 169).

It is important to acknowledge that it is not the main responsibility of supervisors to develop doctoral students' SEI. It is about their awareness that doctoral students will inevitably learn from them and their behaviour and approach. Ultimately, the development of a doctoral student's SEI will depend on their own approach to their programme and their self-awareness. Doctoral students must be proactive and willing to grow and develop beyond their area of expertise to foster the SEI skills that will help them throughout their life.

Effective and meaningful relationships between students and academics are imperative for the development of socio-emotional intelligence in doctoral students [26]. They can provide the space to motivate doctoral students to succeed in their studies. Derounian [33] also highlighted the importance of developing meaningful relationships between academics and students. This was echoed by Arjunan et al. [34], who found that good practice requires academics to connect and engage with students to support them to "reach their true potential." Within the context of doctoral studies, this could be even more impactful as supervisors and doctoral students meet one-to-one on a regular basis.

Hong [22] found that supervisors and doctoral students recognise SEI aspects as important. Areas such as empathy, self-awareness and social expertise were highlighted as key to developing and maintaining effective relationships among them. There is an expectation from supervisors for doctoral students to display SEI [22]. This could be because the doctoral journey is difficult; it can be isolating, and students will need to demonstrate resilience, motivation and self-belief. Still, this is not often considered during the process of doctoral recruitment and development, or during the supervisor training programmes, which are standard practice in the UK to support supervisors to enhance their practice.

It is unrealistic to expect doctoral students to arrive with robust SEI. They might, but this is difficult to gauge. Therefore, opportunities for supervisors and doctoral students to learn about SEI and have the space to develop it as an integral part of the journey are key [2,22]. Another intervention could be developing workshops for supervisors that include understanding the importance of socio-emotional aspects within the learning journey, such as empathy, motivation and engagement, and how these directly impact students' wellbeing and success [33]. These workshops could also explore how these SEI skills will provide the basis for an effective relationship between supervisors and doctoral students.

Stronge [35] asserts that positive interactions between academics and students are significant in promoting an effective learning environment. Within a doctoral context, these relationships develop based on a common subject. Rogers [25] coined the term 'unconditional positive regard', which in the context of doctoral students would be the supervisor's ability to support the student without judgement and with a genuine interest and real concern for the doctoral student and their holistic development. This would impact the student's ability to flourish and thrive. Providing psychological safety would also enable doctoral students to develop their SEI in a safe space where they are supported.

Via this humanistic way of practicing, supervisors will enable doctoral students to explore their ideas, new knowledge, academic identity and their emotions, whether positive or negative, in their common space and with the knowledge that there will be mutual respect [3,26]. One way to do this is to agree, during the first or second supervisory meeting, on a common way of working and a set of 'golden rules' that will be followed by all. These should include mutual respect at all times, a safe space to explore ideas, agreement on ways of practicing, transparency and clarity [29]. Supervisory meetings integrate aspects of a tutorial and mentorship [30], as doctoral students are supported with a more personalised approach, and, therefore, there are opportunities to create meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging. An awareness of the impact that supervisors can have on their doctoral

students during the supervision can impact on the student's self-awareness, motivation and resilience.

5.4. Developing an Academic Identity by Providing Psychological Safety

Although supervisors should role model attitudes and behaviours that are conducive to the development of their doctoral students' SEI, this is not to say that supervisors should want their doctoral students to become just like them [29]. Supporting doctoral students to develop their own academic identity is an important aspect of the doctoral journey. A study by Alexander et al. [36] found that self-reflection is important for developing an academic identity. This identity can be developed by gaining self-awareness [2,26]. An integral part of SEI is self-awareness, and students can develop it by having the time and space to self-reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, talents, progress and other aspects [2,3].

In a doctoral programme, it is important to provide opportunities for doctoral students to reflect on their academic and personal development, as these are intrinsically linked and will form part of their development of an academic identity. To enable this, it is important that doctoral students feel psychological safety. Psychological safety is an individual's view of the risk and consequences associated with their work environment based on a subjective view of how others will respond at a particular time [37].

Considering psychological safety as a key aspect to support doctoral students' development of their SEI is important [38]. There will be times when doctoral students will face uncomfortable situations that they will have to navigate successfully in order to complete their doctoral degree. Doctoral students should feel able to receive constructive feedback without fear. They should be able to share their feelings and emotions and sometimes be vulnerable without worrying about judgment [39].

Within the supervisor–doctoral student space, psychological safety can be influenced by the supervisor's own SEI [39]. Supervisors should use their own self-awareness, considering individuality and displaying transparency and honesty [25]. They should foster an environment of trust and effective communication, encouraging their doctoral students to be aware of their own feelings and behaviours [29]. In this way, both doctoral student and supervisor learn from each other through the supervisory process [38]. Additionally, a robust doctoral training programme offering opportunities to learn how to manage and understand the doctoral students' own wellbeing should be considered [40].

There is scarce literature on psychological safety and the doctoral journey. Gunasekera et al. [39], who found that psychological safety could be influenced by SEI, and that to some extent the supervisor may be the only constant stability in their immediate environment, argue that since the relationship between supervisors and doctoral students can be likened to that of any team in an organisation's setting, the literature on SEI around psychological safety within organisations could be applied to the doctoral–supervisor relationship. Considering this, ideas such as providing a safe environment and giving doctoral students time and space for reflection and growth should be incorporated into doctoral programmes, as well as opportunities to identify and develop the SEI "attributes of supervisors to promote the often hidden and nuanced skills of relationship building to guide doctoral candidates to their goals" [39] (p. 9).

6. Conclusions

The doctoral journey is complex and an emotional time of constant learning and change for a doctoral student. It requires doctoral students to develop the skills that will help them to complete their doctoral studies but also to be resilient and demonstrate SEI in order to enable them to flourish and thrive. It also requires doctoral students to have gained the skills and knowledge they can then apply in their next steps—academic or professional. Considering this, it is important to enable doctoral students to develop their SEI throughout their studies. This can be conducted in various ways through early intervention and specific sessions related to SEI. Providing opportunities to practice their skills in a safe environment

and giving doctoral students the time and space to reflect on their SEI are interventions that will have a positive impact [26].

Since the supervisor–doctoral student relationship is at the centre of a doctoral journey, it is here where doctoral students can develop their SEI the most. Consequently, engaging supervisors in understanding the importance of this relationship for the students' self-development is important. Additionally, ensuring that supervisors foster a culture of psychological safety during their supervisions and that they (supervisors) role model the prosocial behaviours, communication and attitudes related to SEI, so that doctoral students can learn from them, is also important.

Developing SEI takes time, discipline and effort. It will happen gradually and may not be noticeable at the beginning, but individuals working on developing their SEI should at some point feel more centred, more confident, more reflective and empathic, more able to manage their emotions and social interactions and more content within their selves, their behaviour and attitude.

Overall, SEI in the context of the doctoral journey is still underexplored. Consequently, further research on SEI in the context of doctoral students' experience and development, supervisors, their relationship with the supervisor, and current provision should be carried out to enrich this area and ultimately improve the doctoral student experience.

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