

# Emotions can be taught

*“Discovering reasons behind the high student dropout rate at university”*

In an increasingly stressful world, it is a familiar scenario. A minor irritant triggers an explosive over-reaction that temporarily hijacks reason and perspective.

The damage done can be hard to heal, produce unintended consequences, and could even see the perpetrator being directed to anger management classes.

However, research across cultures is proving that the issue of sudden anger is better framed in terms of emotional intelligence, or EI.

Like its better known IQ cousin, EI can be measured using a quiz-style test and scores tend to vary among people. An increasing body of evidence is finding that these differences can have powerful

impacts on quality-of-life outcomes, including physical and mental health.

At Swinburne, where one international measure of EI was developed, researcher Dr Karen Hansen says these studies have an important, but hard to spot implication.

“Unlike our IQ which appears to be difficult to improve relative to our standing with others, EI is a trait that can develop and grow,” she says.

“That means people can improve core competencies and acquire new EI capabilities over a lifetime ... if they are provided with the right tools.”

Developing those tools has become something of a crusade with the Swinburne EI team. Ultimately their aim is to develop a suite of EI products and services for all age groups.

Using collaborative relationships, the team is also actively engaging organisations that stand to benefit from advances in EI.

Overseeing those efforts is the director of the Brain Science Institute, Professor Con Stough. Along with Dr Ben Palmer, he was involved in creating the original SUEIT – the Swinburne University Emotional

Intelligence Test.

“The first version of the test was designed for adults,” Stough says.

“Through the university we then set up Genos EI, a company headed by Palmer that uses the adult SUEIT to help businesses and organisations tackle EI issues in the workplace.

“It has since grown into an international network of specialists who deliver EI products, services and consultants to businesses and researchers worldwide.”

With adults taken care of, the researchers’ focus has since shifted to adolescents and children, a move that entails dealing with EI issues in the classroom.

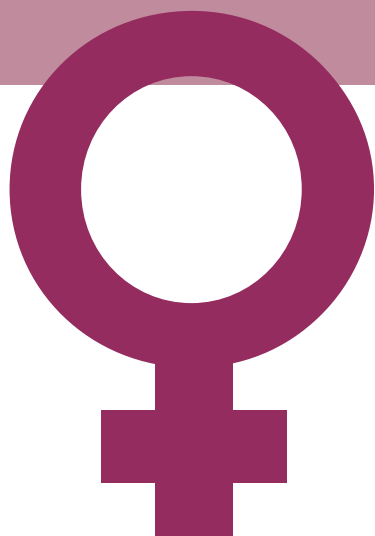
Hansen is supervising a number of projects targeting EI tools to students and teachers.

Swinburne’s tertiary students were the first recruited to the new EI efforts. That project hopes to discover some of the reasons behind the high student-dropout rates at Australian universities. However, given the nature of existing measures, that was as far as EI could go into classrooms, so Stough and Hansen set about applying



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