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The Counsellor as Mediator: Using Mediated Learning Experiences to Build Social Emotional Competencies with Children

Kit Phey Ling and Paulina Chng Sock Wah

Chapter 2

Introduction

Psychologists had long researched the role of non-intellective factors such as intrinsic motivation, locus of control and self-efficacy in cognitive functioning and academic performance (Tzuriel, 1999). As early as 1943, studies by Alexander and Balinsky (as cited in Weschler, 1943) had shown that as much as 35 to 70 percent of all intelligent behaviour could not be accounted for by intellective factors such as verbal ability, abstract reasoning and arithmetic, but rather could only be attributed to non-intellective factors such as affective and conative abilities. In today's popular literature, affective and conative abilities constitute what is known as emotional intelligence.

Being emotionally intelligent means being meta-cognitively effective, i.e., being aware of the demands of a task or problem in relation to one's own strengths and weaknesses, having access to a repertoire of cognitive strategies and processes, and having the ability to monitor and regulate the use of these strategies and processes to enhance thinking and learning (Ee, 2009).

Many theorists believe that emotional intelligence or metacognition can be nurtured, i.e., an individual can be cognitively modified so as to become more emotionally intelligent or meta-cognitively effective. The process of increasing one's emotional intelligence or metacognition is known as social-emotional learning, or SEL (Ministry of Education, 2016). This assumption implies that

emotional intelligence is cognitively modifiable, and can therefore be mediated in the learner. Social-emotional learning focuses on helping learners to recognize and manage their emotions, develop empathy and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively (Ee, 2009).

Traditionally, one of the main functions of the counselling process is to facilitate behavioural change in clients so that they may achieve relevant and desired outcomes (Falik, 2001). Since many clients seek help to resolve interpersonal problems arising from unsatisfactory human relationships (Glasser & Breggin, 2001), counsellors inevitably focus on helping clients to acquire social-emotional competencies to resolve these problems (Ministry of Education, 2016). Counselling therefore becomes a complex interpersonal process, in which counsellors connect with, interview and assess their clients' presenting concerns in order to understand the dynamics of behavior and change and free up as many powerful experiences as can be brought into the human experience and directed towards growth and change (Falik, 2001). Inherent within this interaction are the conditions for a Mediated Learning Experience as defined by Feuerstein (1979, 1980, 1999).

Feuerstein's (1979, 1980, 1999) Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) is a central aspect of human experience. It comprises 12 parameters, of which the first three constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for mediated interaction (Feuerstein and Feuerstein, 1999). We propose that counsellors could become more effective in helping clients to acquire and use social-emotional skills if they are consciously guided by the 12 MLE parameters during the counselling process. Counsellors-as-Mediators (CAMs) would therefore utilize the 12 MLE parameters as follows:

- (i) **Intentionality and reciprocity:** the actions of the Counsellors-as-Mediators (CAMs) are intentional. However, the counselling process only works when the Clients-as-Learners (CALs) respond to their CAMs.

- (ii) **Meaning:** The counselling process focusses on helping the CALs to understand the meanings behind their actions.
- (iii) **Transcendence:** What is discovered and learnt during the counselling process is to be generalized to the life outside the counselling session.
- (iv) **Feeling of competence:** As CALs practice new skills or behaviours learnt during the counselling process, they become more competent and confident in their abilities to do so.
- (v) **Regulation and control of behaviour:** Counselling also focusses on increasing CALs' self-awareness of thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Self-awareness leads to greater ability to regulate and control behaviour, particularly in challenging situations.
- (vi) **Sharing behaviour:** One of the main goals of counselling is to promote pro-social behaviours, so that CALs may reconnect with significant people in their lives. Very often, appropriate sharing is encouraged to facilitate reconnection and even reintegration into society.
- (vii) **Individuation and psychological differentiation:** Just as individuals need to connect to those around them, they also need to be aware of their uniqueness. Counselling, particularly that focused on personal development, helps individuals to understand who they are, and to accept their strengths and weaknesses.
- (viii) **Goal-seeking, goal-setting, and goal-achieving behaviour:** Every therapeutic relationship begins and ends with the CAL's goal. It is therefore the CAM's job to help CALs to define their goals, set achievable and realistic goals, and learn to behave in ways which will help them to achieve these goals.

- (ix) **Challenge - the search for novelty and complexity:** CALs often enter counselling because they are unable to cope with stressors or problematic relationships in life. The CAM's role is to help the CALs to view these stressors or problems as surmountable challenges, and to experiment with new behaviours or forms of coping.
- (x) **An awareness of the human being as a changing entity:** All humans have the capacity to grow and improve over time, if they choose to work towards this. One of the roles of the CAM is to help the CALs to understand this important fact, so that the CALs believe in their ability to change.
- (xi) **Search for an optimistic alternative:** Many CALs enter counselling feeling pessimistic about life, and they might feel helpless about reaching their personal goals. The CAM's role is therefore to help them understand that in life, there are different paths to achieving the same goal, and some paths are easier to navigate than others. Hence, the CAM is there to help the CALs to reframe their experiences so that they become hopeful of achieving their goals, and are therefore more willing to take the first step.
- (xii) **Feeling of belonging:** CALs who are overwhelmed by their problems may perceive their problems as being so unique that no one else can possibly understand what they are going through. As a result, they may feel alone and even alienated from their families and communities. The role of the CAM would therefore be to help the CALs to reconnect with significant people in their lives.

Theoretical Framework

As seen above, the mediated learning experience is a conscious process of cognitive modification initiated by a more knowledgeable adult (Counsellor-as-Mediator) and the client-as-

learner. The Counsellors-as-Mediators (CAMs) interpose themselves between the stimuli and the Clients-as-Learners (CALs) by providing the latter with a framework with which to interpret and hence respond to the stimuli. In Tzuriel's (1999) transactional model, effective mediators not only facilitate non-intellective processes such as "arousal of exploration, seeking of challenges, feelings of competency and feelings of warmth" (p. 105) toward themselves, they are also encouraged by these responses (reciprocity on the part of the learners), and are thus motivated to maintain or adjust their mediational responses towards the learners quantitatively or qualitatively. Therefore, during the counselling process, it is not only the CALs who are affected by the mediated learning experiences provided by the CAMs, but also the CAMs who are affected by the CALs. Tzuriel (1999) referred to this process as being transactional in nature, and he also proposed a transactional model whereby non-intellective factors such as motivational and affective processes play an influential role in influencing the mediated learning experience and the cognitive modifiability of the individual.

Feuerstein, Rand, and Rynders (1988) posited that a mediator's ability to use non-intellective factors to mediate the learner's cognitive functioning was based on his own intra-personal processes, such as his belief system. Hence, during a counselling interaction, it is essential to first understand how non-intellective factors influence the counsellor, the client and their relationship.

Application

A MLE-based counselling process for social-emotional learning

In order to illustrate the application of MLE-based counselling process for helping school-age children to acquire social-emotional competencies (Ministry of Education, 2016), we will use the case of a 10 year old boy Gary, who was referred for counselling after he fought with another boy. According to Santrock (2013), 10 year olds fall within the developmental period known as middle and late childhood (otherwise known as the elementary school years) that extends from about six to eleven years of age.

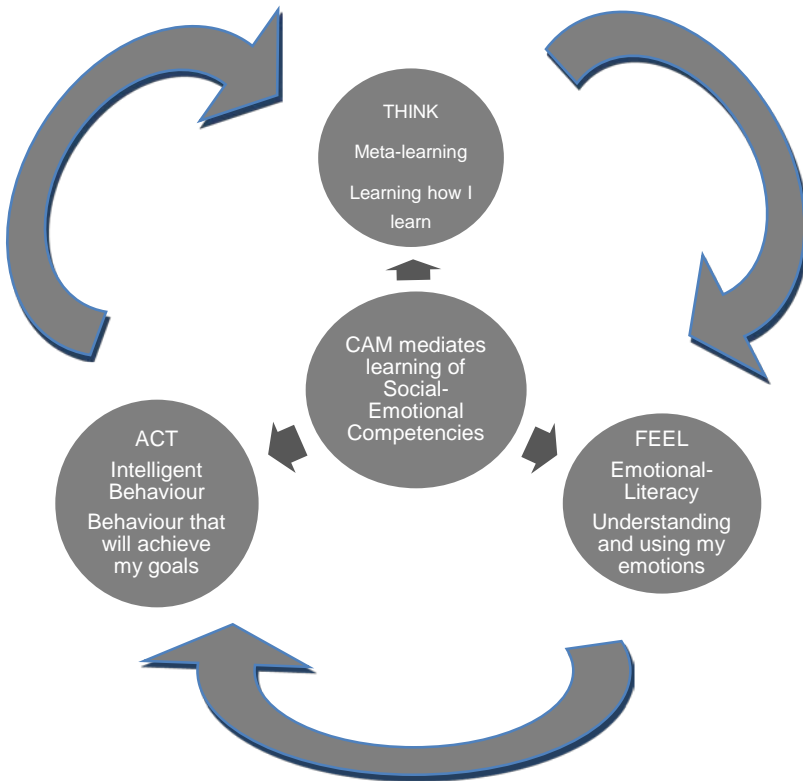
Our experience working with elementary school children have taught us that they tend to react to situations according to their feelings first, and they may or may not think through the consequences of their actions afterwards. We use the acronym “FAT” to describe this process, and this is illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1. “FAT” process chart



Hence, the CAM’s role would be to rearrange the FAT process into a process that leads to socially and emotional acceptable behaviour. We call this process the Think-Feel-Act (TFA) cycle, which we have adapted from Beck, Rush, Shaw, and Emery (1979). Figure 2 illustrates how the CAM may utilize the TFA cycle within the MLE parameters.

Figure 2. Think-Feel-Act (TFA) cycle



As shown in Figure 2, the CAM prompts the CALs to think about the situation and their feelings objectively, and this will in turn influence the way the CALs feel about the situation, and act. After the CALs have taken action, the CAM prompts the CALs to reflect on the impact of their action on themselves, on others, on their relationships and the lessons they have learnt from this situation. In so doing, the CAM not only modifies the CALs' way of thinking about situations, CAM also guides the way the CALs feel about these situations and act in these situations. Most importantly, the CAM helps the CALs to think about how they learn in these situations, i.e.,

they work on the CALs' metacognitive processes. During this MLE-based counselling process, CAM is increasingly encouraged by the success of the MLE, and this prompts CAM to continue implementing it.

Implementing the MLE-based counselling process to learn social-emotional competencies

Children in middle to late childhood master the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and they are formally exposed to the larger world, and its culture (Santrock, 2013). They learn from everything that happens to them, and they do not separate their learning into subjects. Conflicts or dispute in class are not uncommon and such authentic scenarios can be used to improve students' social emotional competencies in interpersonal problem solving. A seven-step conflict resolution process as shown in figure 3 (adapted from Johnson & Johnson, 1995) could be used as a method to scaffold the MLE-based counselling process to guide a 10 year old student to build social-emotional competencies (Ministry of Education, 2016). Regardless of one's specific methodological orientation, the counsellor's responses must be cognizant of the mediational criteria or objectives during the counselling interaction and related to helping the client to achieve behavioural change objectives that move the client towards desired outcomes (Falik, 2001).

Figure 3. Seven-step conflict resolution process

Processes	Social-Emotional Skills Activated
<i>Self-awareness</i>	
1 Describe what you want	• Problem identification
2 Describe how you feel	• Identifying and recognizing emotions
3 Describe the reasons for your wants and feelings	• Accurate self-perception • Recognizing values
<i>Social awareness</i>	
4 Summarize your understanding of what the other person wants and the reason behind it	• Appreciating diversity
5 Summarize your understanding of how the other person feels and why and the reason behind it	• Perspective taking • Empathy
<i>Responsible Decision Making & Relationship Management</i>	
6 Formulate three optional plans	• Problem identification & situation analysis • Problem solving • Evaluation & reflection
7 Choose one of the plans and formalize the agreement with a handshake	• Communication & relationship building • Working cooperatively • Negotiation

The art of good mediation lies in providing stimulating questions rather than answers, questions that supports self-regulation in both cognitive and emotional thinking. We are going to present a scenario of a CAM using the MLE-based counselling process to help the CAL to think about how he learns in this situation by working on the CAL’s metacognitive process and in the process, the CAL is given the tools to improve himself and resolve his problems.

Table 1

Scenario of a Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) using the adapted Johnson and Johnson (1995) seven-step conflict resolution process in a Mediated Learning Experience to build social-emotional competencies in a Client-as-Learner (CAL)

<p>Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions</p>	<p><i>MLE Parameters Activated:</i></p> <p><i>Mediation of:</i></p>
<p>CAM: Hi Gary. Thank you for coming by to see me today. I am not sure if this session will be helpful to you but I will definitely do my best. Your Form Teacher was concerned about you. It seems you were involved in a fight with Ivan this morning inside the school bus. Is that what happened?</p> <p>CAL Gary (shrugged his shoulder, avoided eye contact and scowling): Don't know...</p> <p>CAM (leaning forward): Can you tell me what happen? I'm sure you must have a good reason for hitting Ivan.</p> <p>CAL Gary: ... Well...he started first.</p> <p>CAM (stays silent)</p> <p>CAL Gary: I hit his face with my school bag and he started to have a nose bleed. Everyone in the bus started to scream. But it's not my fault.</p>	<p><i>Intentionality</i></p> <p><i>Reciprocity</i></p>

<p>Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions</p>	<p><i>MLE Parameters Activated:</i></p> <p><i>Mediation of:</i></p>
<p>CAM: So what did Ivan do?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I found out from a classmate that he took my Mathematics workbook yesterday when I left the class to run an errand for teacher during the last period. I was supposed to submit it to Ms Tan this morning and he told me that he left it at home. So I hit him.</p>	
<p><i>Self-awareness (Emotional Literacy). CAM questions CAL, CAL answers CAM's questions.</i></p> <p>CAM: I can see how that would have bothered you and it was inconsiderate of Ivan to take your workbook without asking. How do you feel about that?</p> <p>CAL Gary: Angry, of course.</p> <p>CAM: You feel really angry with Ivan for taking your workbook without your permission and you hit him because he left the book at home.</p> <p>CAL Gary (fuming): Yes. But now I am being punished. It's so unfair.</p> <p>CAM: What would you want instead?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I want Ivan to return my workbook to me and to explain to both the Form Teacher and Ms Tan that he started it.</p>	<p><i>Meaning (Self)</i></p> <p><i>Regulation and Control of Behaviour</i></p>

<p>Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions</p>	<p>MLE Parameters Activated:</p> <p>Mediation of:</p>
<p>CAM: How does Ivan help you by doing that?</p> <p>CAL Gary: In the first place, the workbook belongs to me. He should have asked me before taking it without telling me. Well, at least, the Form Teacher will know that I didn't hit Ivan for nothing and also Ms Tan will know my reason for not handling in the workbook today.</p> <p>CAM: Ok. So you have figured out what you want. Do you think Ivan will share your same intentions?</p> <p>CAL Gary (remained silent)</p>	
<p><i>Social-awareness (Emotional Literacy). CAM questions CAL, CAL answers CAM's questions.</i></p> <p>CAM: What do you suppose Ivan would want?</p> <p>CAL Gary: He will probably not care. He wants to get me into trouble.</p> <p>CAM: Why do you think Ivan took your book in the first place?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I think he wanted to copy my workings as teacher told the class that my workings are well done.</p> <p>CAM: How do you think Ivan felt when he has</p>	<p><i>Meaning (Others)</i></p> <p><i>Goal-seeking, goal-setting, and goal-achieving behaviour (Others)</i></p>

<p>Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions</p>	<p>MLE Parameters Activated:</p> <p>Mediation of:</p>
<p>to take your workbook without telling you?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I'm not him. How would I know?</p> <p>CAM: Let's just pretend that you know.</p> <p>CAL Gary: I think his Maths is seriously quite bad. He probably felt lousy to steal my workbook just to copy my workings because he cannot do it. He also might be happy to quickly finish his work and to have something to hand up so that he will not get scolding from teacher.</p>	
<p><i>Responsible Decision Making & Relationship Management (Thinking). CAM questions CAL, CAL answers CAM's questions.</i></p> <p>CAM: That's interesting. You think Ivan could be feeling both happy and lousy at the same time and you can also understand the reasons behind what he did. Since both of you needed the workbook for the same reasons and both of you feel lousy, Ivan for taking your book to copy without permission and you for hitting him inside the school bus, what do you think you can do to resolve this problem?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I don't know.</p> <p>CAM: Try to come out with some ideas how you can handle this differently.</p>	<p><i>Challenge – the search for novelty and complexity</i></p> <p><i>Goal-seeking, goal-setting, and goal achieving behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Regulation and Control of</i></p>

Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions	MLE Parameters Activated: Mediation of:
<p>CAL Gary: Maybe I will not hit him as hard next time.</p> <p>CAM: Gary, you know that is not what I asked.</p> <p>CAL Gary: I guess I could just inform Teacher that he took my workbook instead of hitting him.</p> <p>Counsellor: Is there anything else you can do that would be more helpful?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I can also try to show him the workings inside my book when he needed my help. Or I can tell Ivan that I can lend him my workbook if he makes sure to return it to me when I need to hand it up.</p> <p>CAM: What will happen if you choose solution 1 and just inform your teacher that he took your workbook?</p> <p>CAL Gary: He may deny taking my book and I will still end up hitting him because I am so mad with him.</p> <p>CAM: What about Solution 2 where you show him the workings inside your book when he asked for your help?</p> <p>CAL Gary: He gets his help but I don't know, I</p>	<p><i>behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Sharing behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Meaning</i></p> <p><i>Meaning</i></p>

Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions	MLE Parameters Activated: Mediation of:
<p>think he might steal from me again.</p> <p>CAM: I am wondering if there is anything else that you could do to help him and ensure that he doesn't steal from you again.</p> <p>CAL Gary: Well...I suppose I could lend him my workbook and tell him to return it to me so I can hand it up...</p> <p>CAM: What do you think will happen if you did this?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I think that will make him happy because he gets what he wants without stealing. I guess he will be more careful and he will return it to me when I need to hand it up.</p> <p>CAM: That sounds good. Looking at the three solutions that you have come out with, which one do you think works best for both of you?</p> <p>CAL Gary: The last one, I guess.</p> <p>CAM: Can you tell me how helping Ivan will help your relationship with him?</p> <p>CAL Gary: If I help him and he is happy, then we won't fight and become enemies. We can still be friends.</p>	<p><i>Sharing Behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Goal-seeking, goal-setting, and goal achieving behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Search for an optimistic alternative.</i></p> <p><i>Meaning</i></p> <p><i>Goal-seeking, goal-setting, and goal achieving behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Sharing Behaviour</i></p> <p><i>Feeling of Belonging</i></p>

<p>Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions</p>	<p>MLE Parameters Activated:</p> <p>Mediation of:</p>
<p>CAM affirms CAL's efforts CAM: I'm impressed that you are able to think through this problem and resolve it.</p> <p>CAL acts on decision CAL Gary (Grinning): Ok. I will talk to Ivan about this.</p>	<p><i>An awareness of the human being as a changing entity.</i></p> <p><i>Feeling of competence</i></p>
<p>Social-Emotional-Awareness (Self): CAM asks CAL reflective questions. CAL thinks about what he has learnt and how he learnt it.</p> <p>CAM: So what have you learnt about yourself from this experience?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I do not mind lending my work to others to help them but I get really angry when they do so without asking me and then act like they are not wrong.</p> <p>Counsellor: Think about that. What does that say about you as a person?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I guess I dislike people who are irresponsible. Maybe, being responsible is important to me and I guess..., I was really more worried that Ms Tan will think that I am irresponsible for not handing up my work.</p> <p>CAM: Yes, Gary, I can appreciate that being a responsible person is important to you and that is your strength too. However, you also</p>	<p><i>Individuation and psychological differentiation</i></p> <p><i>Meaning</i></p>

<p>Counsellor-as-Mediator (CAM) - Client-as-Learner (CAL) interactions</p>	<p><i>MLE Parameters Activated:</i></p> <p><i>Mediation of:</i></p>
<p>realized that there is a flipside to it.</p> <p>CAL Gary: Ya... I care a lot about how others see me. Especially people that I respect and I just lost my cool...</p>	
<p><i>Social-Emotional awareness (Others): CAM asks learner reflective questions. CAL thinks about what he has learnt and how he learnt it.</i></p> <p>CAM (Smiling): So what have you learnt about other people, say for example, Ivan from this experience?</p> <p>CAL Gary: I think he is worried about how others see him too. That's why he took my workbook without telling me because he did not want me to know he is weak in Maths. He also wanted teacher to think that he is good in Maths so he copied my work.</p>	<p><i>Transcendence</i></p> <p><i>Meaning (others)</i></p>
<p><i>Social-Emotional Learning: CAM asks CAL reflective questions. CAL thinks about what he has learnt and how he learnt it.</i></p> <p>CAM: I see. So, what have you learnt about dealing with such problems in future?</p> <p>CAL Gary: You know, I think if I had tried to think through what was happening for both Ivan and me, I could have discover better ways to handle this.</p>	<p><i>Regulation and Control of behaviour</i></p>

and mediational skills are in place that CAMs are able to start building the emotional bond with the CALs, and influence CALs to accept mediation by overcoming the motivational-affective barriers that are currently preventing them from benefiting from the MLE-based counselling interaction, and bring to the forefront the CALs' innate need for mastery. In the process of mediation, the CALs' sense of competence in their own abilities to self-regulate their thoughts, feelings and behaviour build as they master increasingly challenging socio-emotional tasks and situations.

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