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PROMOTING ADVERSITY QUOTIENT AMONG SINGAPOREAN SCHOOL CHILDREN

Review by
Lachlan E. D. Crawford and Chua Tee Teo

INTRODUCTION

The notions of Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ) and more recently Adversity Quotient (AQ) have been employed by behavioural scientists to understand and develop human potential. IQ is simply a ratio of a person's mental age to his/her chronological age, multiplied by a 100 (Binet, 1909; Terman, 1916). EQ refers to attributes of self-awareness, self-confidence, self-control and the ability to initiate and accept change (Goleman, 1995, 1997). AQ refers to a person's ability to remain hopeful and to maintain positive control of one's actions in times of adversity (Stoltz, 1997).

The concept of AQ was initiated in the corporate field of management as new demands, created by accelerated economic development, have generated increasing levels of employment stress in business and industry. Ever since the inception of AQ, business organisations have paid increasing attention to its application, taking seriously the idea that a little more time spent on having tools to cope with adversity may pay rich dividends in terms of better employee relationships and work output.

This article briefly examines the concept of Adversity Quotient; reveals the lack of school-based research in this area and considers why it is becoming increasingly important for Singaporean school children. The article also explores what is being done to promote AQ and suggests a number of strategies teachers could use to increase awareness of it.

WHAT IS AQ?

The concept of Adversity Quotient (AQ) is not particularly new. Nearly forty years ago, Albert Ellis (1962) based his rational-emotive model of behaviour on the notion that it is one's beliefs about events rather than the events themselves that generate reactions and feelings. Ellis (1962) paved the way for several follow-up studies including those of Aaron Beck (1976), the founder of Cognitive Therapy. Beck's (1976) approach has also been successfully used as part of cognitive therapy for helping depressed adults. The phrase gained popularity with the publication of a book entitled Adversity Quotient written by Paul Stoltz in 1997. In the text the author reviews the research on theories of human performance and effectiveness; defines the nature of adversity quotient; illustrates that success can be achieved in an age of adversity; and documents how organisations are teaching the skills required to deal with adversity.

Stoltz (1997) believes that AQ embodies...
two essential components of any practical concept - scientific theory and real world application. He argues that success in work and life is largely determined by AQ which predicts:

- how well a person withstands adversity and his/her ability to surmount it;
- who will overcome adversity and who will be crushed;
- who will exceed expectations of their performance and potential and who will fall short; and
- who prevails and who gives up.

Stoltz (1997) also states that AQ takes three forms. First, AQ is a new conceptual framework for understanding and enhancing all facets of success. It builds upon a substantial base of landmark research, offering a practical, new combination of knowledge that redefines what it takes to succeed. Second, AQ is a measure of how a person responds to adversity as subconscious patterns of behaviour can now be measured, understood and changed. Finally, AQ is a scientifically grounded set of tools for modifying how a person responds to adversity and, as a result, improves overall personal and professional effectiveness. The combination of these three elements is a complete package for understanding and improving control of one's actions in times of adversity.

Significantly, Stoltz (1997) asserts that there is a relationship between AQ and academic success. He maintains that if students make conscious efforts to grapple with academic problems and take positive action to solve them via a structured game plan, they can increase their self worth, motivation to complete tasks and the ability to succeed in academic pursuits.

**REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH**

There is a paucity of local school-based research in this area. It should be noted, however, that Teo and Quah (1999), in a study on the effects of an intervention programme on self-knowledge and volition attempted to educate 57 lower secondary students in the Gifted Education Programme in Singapore about their volition, or will, and positive beliefs. Students were alerted to the possibility of using their will to make moral choices; to make decisions on courses of action; and to control divergent thoughts while they were working on specific tasks. They were also made aware of the importance of time management, goal-setting and goal-striving within a given time frame. In addition, students were taught stress management techniques during the latter part of the intervention programme. The results of the study indicate that pupils in an experimental group outperformed pupils in a control group in the areas of non-academic or personal and social achievement, specifically in the field of games, sports and other out-of-school activities (Teo & Quah, 1999).

In another study, Lim (1998) advocated the use of 'person-centred lifestyle planning models' to help pupils with disabilities from disadvantaged homes overcome adversities. His proposed models aimed at involving pupils actively in school community life, although there was no mention of activation of the will of the individual to overcome obstacles in times of stress. D'Rozario and Goh (1998), in a further study, indicated that secondary students in a sample of government schools in Singapore coped with stress by seeking relaxing diversions; using problem-focused strategies;
systematically focusing on the positive aspects of their work; using physical recreation; and seeking social support. However, none of these studies has made any attempt to define or measure AQ.

WAYS TO PROMOTE AQ

A review of syllabus documents reveals that awareness of AQ is not formally taught in Singapore schools. However, it would be fair to comment that attempts to promote AQ indirectly can be seen in Ministry of Education programmes which encourage pupils to pre-empt difficulties often faced in adolescence such as drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, teenage pregnancy and, more recently, violence. The programmes are prepared by the Ministry’s Pastoral Care and Career Guidance Branch under the aegis of Affective and Career Education - the ACE model.

Stoltz (1997) suggests that the way to promote AQ is to learn the LEAD sequence. This sequence is based on the notion that we can alter our chances of success by changing our habits of thought. Change is created by disputing old patterns of thought and consciously forming new ones. Stoltz (1997) postulates that there are four simple steps involved in raising a person's AQ.

1. **L** = Listen to one's response to adversity. Essentially this means developing the ability to sense immediately when adversity is happening.

2. **E** = Explore all *origins* and your *ownership* of the result. *Origins* means accepting appropriate blame for causing the adverse situation and *ownership* of the result means holding yourself accountable for doing something to deal with and improve, if not resolve the situation caused by the adversity, even if you did not cause it.

3. **A** = Analyse the evidence. This involves a simple questioning process in which you examine, dispute and eventually derail the destructive aspects of your response.

4. **D** = Do something. This is not compulsive action, but action based on critical thought.
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Teachers who wish to promote AQ among their pupils may consider trying the LEAD sequence in action. This involves the following steps.

1. L = Listen to the adversity response.
   In essence, this means teaching students to recognise an adversity. A pupil’s adversity, for instance, may be being down-hearted after failing an examination. The teacher could listen to the woes of the pupil and encourage him to be conscious of the nature and scope of the adversity. The teacher could then ask the pupil to talk about his feelings, expectations and perhaps his beliefs on the extent to which the failure could have been avoided.

2. E = Explore the origins of the adversity and the ownership of the outcome.
   The first part, origins, is to encourage the student to clarify who is really at fault. This entails revealing the possible tendency to place the blame for failure elsewhere - on the location, timing or the format of the examination, for example - or taking all the blame oneself. Essentially, the procedure is meant to encourage the student to place the situation in perspective. The second part, ownership, helps the student to rationalise who is accountable for clearing up the mess.

3. A = Analyse the evidence.
   At this stage, the teacher could lead the student to appreciate if there is any evidence to suggest that he has no control over the situation, and if there is any evidence to indicate that the distressful situation need not be prolonged. For example, if the pupil appreciates that the causes of failure are a lack of knowledge, hard work or study skills, then the pupil needs to be taught that he has control over the situation as he is the active agent involved in improving the situation. The pupil must be made to realise that the agony of the failure need not be prolonged.

4. D = Do something.
   Finally, the teacher must lead the student to take action to overcome the adversity. It is most important that the teacher does not tell the student what to do, but helps him choose or decide on his own action plan. The teacher should guide the pupil to gain control of the situation through clear thinking and wise choice of actions. In the event of an examination failure, this could include drawing up a study plan; working through past papers to get used to apportioning time for each question; using flash cards to help retain essential information; and preparing relevant study notes.
CONCLUSION

In today's extremely stressful society, the promotion of AQ has the potential to promote a significant increase in energy, motivation, vitality and performance at work and in schools. It is an opportune time for educational authorities in Singapore to examine methods to promote AQ among Singaporean school children.

SOURCES


