

The Emotionally Intelligent Teacher: A Transformative Learning Model

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ABSTRACT

This article presented a research-based model of emotional intelligence and explored the role of emotional intelligence in effective teaching and learning. A growing body of research supporting the value of emotional intelligence to both effective teaching and student achievement was presented. The role and importance of emotional intelligence to transformative learning are discussed. Emotional intelligence skill characteristics of effective teachers are illustrated. To achieve the high goals and expectations of education in the 21st century, the intentional inclusion and development of emotional intelligence skills in teacher preparation programs and student development programs are needed.

Introduction

A growing body of interdisciplinary research clearly has connected the relationship of emotional intelligence to achievement, productivity, leadership, and personal health (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Epstein, 1998; Sternberg, 1996; Gardner, 1993; Weisenger, 1998; Low, 2000; Nelson and Low, 1999, 2003, 2005). Recent doctoral research has linked emotional intelligence with academic achievement and college success (Stottlemyre, 2002; Vela, 2003; Smith, 2004; Williams, 2004; and Potter, 2005). These research studies have identified the need to provide emotional intelligence instruction into the curricula to improve academic and career success.

New research (Goad, 2005; Justice, 2005) has indicated the importance and value of emotional intelligence in teacher preparation programs. According to their research, Goad and Justice indicate that pre-service teacher education, induction experiences with mentoring, and alternative certification programs could be strengthened by providing emotional intelligence training in preparing new teachers. Emotional intelligence skills were linked to both classroom management performance and teacher retention factors for new and novice teachers.

With the established relationship of emotional intelligence skills and academic achievement, students would benefit from learning and applying emotional intelligence skills to improve academic performance in school and college settings. With new research evidence linking emotional intelligence to instructional performance and as a factor in teacher retention, pre-service, new, and novice teachers could benefit from learning and using emotional intelligence skills for personal and professional development.

Education Model of Emotional Intelligence

In our education model (Nelson and Low, 1977-2005), a defining feature is that emotional intelligence is best understood and learned when framed around specific emotional skills and competencies. Simply stated, emotional intelligence is a learned ability to identify, understand, experience, and express human emotions in healthy and productive ways. Emotional experience and expression are unique to each teacher and student. No one else thinks, expresses feelings, chooses behaviors, and acts in the same way. Our research-based approach to emotional intelligence addresses this unique human condition.

We define emotional intelligence as a confluence of developed abilities to: (1) know and value self; (2) build and maintain a variety of strong, productive, and healthy relationships; (3) get along and work well with others in achieving positive results; and (4) effectively deal with the pressures and demands of daily life and work. The development of emotional intelligence is an intentional, active, and engaging process.

Affective learning requires a person-centered process for teacher and student growth and development. When emotional intelligence skills are a focus of learning, teachers and students are building human development behaviors that are intricately related to the positive outcomes of achievement, goal achievement, and personal well-being. In our model, the key emotional intelligence competencies and skills are conceptualized below..

Emotional Skills Assessment Process

| | Competencies | Skills |
|-----|---|---|
| I | Interpersonal and Healthy Relationships | 1 Assertion 2 Anger Management 3 Anxiety Management |
| II | Personal Leadership | 4 Comfort 5 Empathy 6 Decision Making 7 Leadership |
| III | Self Management | 8 Drive Strength 9 Time Management 10 Commitment Ethic 11 Positive Personal Change |
| IV | Intrapersonal | 12 Self Esteem 13 Stress Management |

The Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP) provides an assessment of EI skills and a foundation for the Emotional Learning System. This learning system involves the person in a discovery process of emotional intelligence skills and then guides the person through a sequential, step-by-step, skills development process. The sequential learning process is illustrated step-by-step.

Emotional Learning System

| | | |
|--------|------------|---|
| Step 1 | Explore | Self Assessment with ESAP |
| Step 2 | Identify | Self Awareness with ESAP Profile |
| Step 3 | Understand | Self Knowledge (teaching/learning |
| Step 4 | Learn | Self Development (mentoring/coaching/imagery) |
| Step 5 | Apply | Self Improvement (intentionally using/modeling) |

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning changes or transforms the person into a more effective teacher and student. Transformative learning is an empowering educational process that helps teachers and students to: (1) develop positive, healthy, productive relationships; (2) solve problems and make good choices/decisions; (3) stay attuned to healthy and successful outcomes; (4) manage self in achieving goals; (5) plan and make changes when needed; (6) behave wisely and responsibly (Low and Nelson, 2005).

In a transformative learning environment, teachers and students are actively involved in positive and engaging interactions. Instruction is student-centered, focused on dialogue, and relevant to the student's frame of reference. Transformative learning provides a focus on the development of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that students can use to improve themselves academically and career-wise throughout their life. A major factor in transformative learning is an effective relationship between the student and teacher.

Healthy Learning Environments

A simple and major problem for schools and colleges is to provide a safe environment that is emotionally healthy and academically challenging. Healthy learning environments are critical to the development of constructive thinking as well as problem solving, goal setting, achievement, and leadership behaviors. A healthy learning environment is characterized by trust, respect, and engaging dialogue in the classroom. The creation of a healthy learning environment focused on personal, academic, and career excellence requires an understanding and emphasis on affective as well as cognitive skills. The emotional intelligence skills of assertion, time management, goal achievement (drive strength), commitment ethic, stress management, and positive change are particularly important to academic achievement and college success. With a focus on emotional intelligence skills, learning becomes an active, engaging, and student-centered process.

In a time of increased accountability for achievement and personal responsibility, teachers must learn and apply new skills to reduce the effects of negative stress, to establish and build positive and supportive relationships, and develop emotional intelligence. Healthy classroom environments minimize negative stress and contribute to more effective student learning.

Teacher Stress and Attrition

Educators live in a time of rapid change and increased demands. Physical and psychological problems occur when constant alarm reactions exhaust our response capacities. Our body's alarm responses are set off by stressors. Stress is related to both positive and negative change, and stress is not the problem. Stress negatively impacts health and productivity when our responses to stressors are too intense and too long in duration. It is difficult for teachers to remain healthy and effective in demanding work environments unless they learn and apply positive stress management skills daily.

Teaching is a stressful profession. High levels of negative stress and emotional reactivity lead to burn-out and/or negative outcomes. Research findings suggest that unrealistic expectations between teacher training and reality of teaching, a lack of clear performance standards with constructive feedback, increasing physical demands and added responsibilities, inadequate pay and resources, and physically and psychologically dangerous work environments lead to teacher dissatisfaction and attrition.

While teachers cannot control issues related to salary, teaching assignment, paperwork, class size, student behavior, or support from administrators, they can learn and choose to develop skilled behaviors to deal with stressors. Emotional intelligence skills are key to managing stress and the daily pressures of life and work.

Goad (2005) and Justice (2005) concluded that pre-service, new, and novice teachers could benefit from emotional intelligence training. In a study conducted with first-year college students who were planning to become teachers, Elkins and Low (2004) identified a clear need to develop communication competence and emotional intelligence skills. Vela (2003), Stottlemire (2003), Williams (2004), and Nelson and Low (2003, 2004, 2005) provided evidence that student achievement could be improved by learning and developing key emotional intelligence skills.

The Emotionally Intelligent Teacher

Emotionally healthy behavior is reflected in characteristic ways of (1) thinking, (2) identifying, managing, and expressing feelings, and (3) choosing effective behaviors. Becoming an emotionally intelligent teacher is a journey and process, not an arrival state or end result. Emotionally intelligent teachers are active in their orientation to students, work, and life. They are resilient in response to negative stress and less likely to overwhelm themselves with pessimism and strong, negative emotions. An emotionally intelligent teacher learns and applies emotional intelligence skills to improve:

- physical and mental health by gaining knowledge/techniques to break the habit of emotional reactivity (Stress Management);
- productivity and personal satisfaction by helping to harmonize their thinking and feeling minds (Self Esteem and Confidence);

- self esteem and confidence by learning specific emotional intelligence skills (Positive Personal Change);
- communication in personal and work relationships (Assertion);
- ability to manage anxiety and improve performance under pressure (Anxiety Management);
- ability to quickly establish and maintain effective interpersonal relationships (Comfort);
- ability to understand and accept differences in others and diversity issues (Empathy);
- ability to plan, formulate, implement effective problem solving procedures in stressful situations (Decision Making);
- ability to positively impact, persuade, and influence others (Leadership);
- ability to direct energy and motivation to accomplish personally meaningful goals (Drive Strength);
- ability to manage time to meet goals and assignments (Time Management);
- ability to complete tasks and responsibilities in a timely and dependable manner (Commitment Ethic); and
- Ability to control and manage anger and improve performance under stressful conditions and situations (Anger Management).

The Emotional Skills Assessment Process and Emotional Learning System provide an assessment and learning process to help teachers develop a plan of action to learn and apply emotional intelligence skills. Teachers who intentionally develop emotional skills and model emotionally intelligent behavior on a daily basis experience more success and satisfaction in their professional career and life.

Emotionally intelligent teachers are more resilient and proactive in responding to stressors and less likely to react to stress. Teachers who model emotional intelligence are characterized by: intentional reflective (not reactive) behavior, more flexible (not resistant to change), assertive communication (not aggressive or passive), more optimistic and hopeful (not pessimistic and negative), and relies on skills and positive habits (not reactive habits).

Emotional Intelligence and Transformative Learning

Extensive research and a growing 'culture of evidence' support the inclusion of emotional intelligence into the curriculum to develop teachers and students. The role and importance of emotional intelligence to personal, academic, and career success are established. Transformative learning models are needed in schools, colleges, and universities. Everyone benefits when teachers and students learn and practice emotionally intelligent behavior. A research-based, educational model of emotional intelligence provides a positive and practical approach to help teachers and students stay healthy, reduce negative stress, increase goal achievement, act responsibly, and effectively deal with change.

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