

# **Managing Emotions: Emotional Development and Student Behavior**

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*Students enrolled in a college business course were assessed in the area of emotional intelligence. The information gathered provided insight into how students react and respond to ordinary as well as stressful life events. The students learned the importance of how greater self-awareness, managing of emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills help to improve student behavior through emotional development. Understanding a connection between these important emotional skills and behavioral outcomes may lead to better assessment in the area of managing emotions within the classroom.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study considers the emotional aspects of learning as measured through emotional intelligence characteristics. Determining what improves student engagement within the classroom can be challenging. According to Fink (2007), effective educational strategies for coursework should include opportunities for improving both cognitive and emotional aspects of learning. Instructors are facing mounting changes within higher education that are impacting delivery methods for course material. For instance, today's students are increasingly culturally diverse, technologically savvy, and multi-task oriented. The traditional approach to student learning provided a hierarchical view of attaining foundational knowledge and course content (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956).

Approaches to the learning process have expanded to include emotional and non-hierarchical components that considered the importance of life-long learning (Robinson, 2009). The motivation for this study was to better understand the role of emotional intelligence in student behavior and interactions within the classroom. Students enrolled in a college business course, within a small liberal arts university, were assessed in the area of emotional maturity by submitting survey information related to five areas of emotional intelligence. These five areas included self-awareness, managing of emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills as defined by the *Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment Profile* (EISAP).

## **EMOTIONAL MATURITY**

The emotional intelligence literature presents a growing body of knowledge concerning definitions, causal relationships, and interpretation of results. Major contributors include Mayer-Salovey, Goleman, and Bar-On. The Mayer-Salovey model defines emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions to facilitate thinking. The Goleman model views emotional

intelligence as an array of emotional and social competencies that contribute to managerial performance. The Bar-On model describes emotional intelligence as a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills, and facilitators that impact intelligent behavior. Bar-On focuses on an individual's ability to cope. Thus, the EQ factors provide detailed insight into what actually comprises emotional intelligent coping behaviors (Bar-On, 2004).

Other contributors to emotional intelligence research have focused on the development of people through coaching, counseling, teaching, and mentoring. For instance, Boyatzis, Smith, and Blaize (2006) analyzed the importance of relationship building. The authors proposed that aspects of emotional intelligence such as coaching others with compassion reduce employee stress, improve holistic wellness, and enhance organizational leadership. Goleman, Boyatzis, and Mckee (2004) emphasized the need to further explore within the field of *leader resonance* and *mood management* to better understand the impact of emotional intelligence on business results.

Conger (2004) offered reassurance to individuals seeking to better understand the nature and development of self-awareness as well as other emotional intelligence traits. Goleman (1998) supported the notion that emotional intelligence can be both inherited and acquired. The author claimed, "One thing is certain: emotional intelligence increases with age. There is an old-fashioned word for the phenomenon: maturity. Yet even with maturity, some people still need training to enhance their emotional intelligence." (p. 97).

## **DISCUSSION**

Students enrolled in a college business course, within a small liberal arts university, were assessed in the area of emotional maturity by submitting survey information related to five areas of emotional intelligence. These five areas included self-awareness, managing of emotions, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. A total of 56 students representing 3 classes responded to a 35 question survey (EISAP). The survey included a five-point Likert scale with 1 being low emotional intelligence to 5 being high emotional intelligence. The students demonstrated high emotional intelligence scores according to the EISAP survey results: students from class 1 had an average emotional intelligence score of 132; students from class 2 had an average emotional intelligence score of 135; and students from class 3 had an average emotional intelligence of 136. In addition, students scored highest in the areas of empathy and social skills. Overall, students displayed medium to high emotional intelligence in key areas within the EISAP. In general, (1) female students scored higher than their male counterparts; (2) students 21 years of age and older scored higher than their younger counterparts; (3) students scored highest on the empathy and social skills dimensions of emotional intelligence; (4) time of day (morning or afternoon period) did not appear to significantly influence overall emotional intelligence scores.

## **SUMMARY**

The motivation for this study was to better understand the role of emotional intelligence in student behavior and interactions within the classroom. Consequently, the findings from this study offered insight into which emotional intelligence traits were displayed among the surveyed students. For instance, students scoring high in self-awareness may demonstrate more reflection and intuition, whereas students scoring high in empathy would likely demonstrate more compassion and responsiveness toward others. Future and ongoing research could include the following: looking closer at existing data for key relationships; surveying future students for comparisons among differing classes; further examining age, gender, and major variables for the five emotional intelligence components (self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills); considering relationships between emotional maturity, as scored by the EISAP, and student behavior or assessment outcomes; and determining if findings can provide insight into better classroom management.

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