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EI training and pre-service teacher wellbeing ☆

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is a profession of high occupational stress and 'emotional labour' that can potentially result in job dissatisfaction, mental health problems, and leaving the profession. Emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses an array of emotional competencies that facilitate the identification, processing, and regulation of emotion and may enhance successful stress management, as well as augmentation of teacher well-being and classroom performance. Drawing upon research that EI can be developed through specific training, a modified version of the program, "Managing Occupational Stress through the Development of Emotional Intelligence" (Hansen, Gardner, & Stough, 2007), was administered to pre-service teachers over a five-week period. A control group completed only the questionnaire protocol of EI and other measures at the start, end, and one month following the program. Results were generally in line with those obtained by Poole and Saklofske (2009) suggesting that EI and related psychological well-being variables can be positively impacted by focused EI training.

1. Introduction

Teaching is recognized as one of the most important occupations in contemporary society, given the teacher's pivotal role in student learning and achievement and the preparation of children and adolescents for life and its responsibilities as adults (e.g., Mclntyre & Battle, 1998; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004). However, for decades, researchers and educators have also described the detrimental impact of teacher stress in *Canadian* schools and its cost to both the education system and society at large (Savage, Saklofske, & Mollard, 1988). Teaching can certainly be described as a job of high 'emotional labour' (Brennan, 2006; Hargreaves, 1998) with elevated levels of occupational stress (e.g., Chang, 2009; Kokkinos, 2007), often resulting in job dissatisfaction, mental health problems, and leaving the profession (Chan, 2006).

The causes of stress in teaching are quite variable, ranging from managing large classes of diverse students to substantial expectations from parents and administrators. However, it is the 'stresses and strain' that result from these, often excessive and continuous, emotional demands that ultimately impact not only teachers, but the educational, personal, social, and emotional outcomes of their students (Chan, 2006). The new movement in current research, with an emphasis on school-based mental health (Leschied, Flett, & Saklofske, 2013), has recently directed attention to addressing negative psychological outcomes resulting from these emotional demands. An overdue focus is now being placed on supporting the psychological health and wellbeing of teachers.

The assumption that teachers can 'naturally' manage stress effectively has been challenged (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005; Parker, Saklofske, Wood, & Collin, 2009). While there is evidence that modifying environments and providing required support structures can impact teacher stress (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010), successfully managing stress can be further enhanced by providing individuals with an increased capacity to cope and address the physiological and psychological effects of stress that in turn, lead to increases in one's personal and professional sense of wellness and well-being. Though researchers are cognizant of the need to support the psychological health of teachers, there remains a dearth of applicable, empirically based training programs aimed at effectively managing teacher stress in the classroom.

1.1. Emotional intelligence and teacher stress

Emotional intelligence (EI), encompassing an array of emotional competencies that facilitate the identification, processing, and regulation of emotion (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005), has been shown to provide an avenue for supporting psychological and physical health and wellbeing. Drawing upon research from psychology, education, and occupational management, it has been argued that higher levels of EI can mediate stress escalation and improve its

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management (e.g., Chan, 2006; Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton, & Osborne, 2012), that EI can help facilitate effective teaching (e.g., Perry & Ball, 2005), and that EI skills overlap with and may contribute to or underlie a large portion of the positive factors comprising teacher efficacy (Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013).

It has been consistently reported that higher EI is associated with less occupational stress and greater psychological and physical health (see Stough, Saklofske, & Parker, 2009), in addition to facilitating adaptive coping and managing adverse situations effectively in a variety of circumstances (e.g., Brackett & Katulak, 2007; Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, & Woods, 2007; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009). Brackett and Katulak (2006) reported on the positive relationship between increased social and emotional skills, and effective teaching and teacher wellbeing. Perry and Ball (2005) described the greater attunement to the emotional needs of others, ability to interact with students in ways that extend individualized learning opportunities, and more effective management of their own emotional responses in those teachers with higher EI. Such examples highlight the potential importance of EI in education and their effect on interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes in the workplace. Furthermore, research has provided preliminary evidence that EI capacity and skills can be developed through specific EI-program training (e.g., Gardner, 2005; Parker et al., 2009; Poole & Saklofske, 2009).

1.2. Teachers, pre-service teachers, and EI training

Programs have been developed to manage occupational stress through EI training (Hansen, Gardner, & Stough, 2007). More general applications of EI principles have been utilized to improve emotional management and regulation including mindfulness-based EI training (Ciarrochi, Blackledge, Bilich, & Bayliss, 2007), a theory-based practical training of EI skills (Kornacki & Caruso, 2007), and an EI development course within a variation of the Leadership Executive Assessment and Development program (Boyatzis, 2007; see also Cherniss & Adler, 2000). Researchers have been successful in improving EI skills in various groups ranging from UK managers (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003) to university students at risk for dropout (Parker, Hogan, Eastabrook, Oke, & Wood, 2006). Research also suggests that resilience, the management of the stress, and ways of addressing adverse situations can be improved by increasing EI. Gardner (2006) also showed EI training to be effective in increasing self-reported EI, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction as well as in reducing occupational stress.

The EI training program by Hansen and colleagues (2007) has been adapted for use with teachers (“Managing Occupational Stress through the Development of Emotional Intelligence”) as well as for both teachers and students (Hansen, 2010; “Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom”). An evaluation of the former, the original Australian program, was successful in increasing the participants' EI, reducing their occupational stress, and improving their psychological and physical wellbeing (Gardner, 2005). A study of this program with Canadian student teachers suggested that EI scores did increase at the conclusion of the program and one month following completion (Poole & Saklofske, 2009). Encouraged by these findings, more studies are needed to provide further evidence for the use of such training within pre-service teacher programs, and to empirically validate the specific outcomes of EI programs.

1.3. The present study

The present study is part of an ongoing research program evaluating the efficacy and effectiveness of emotional intelligence training for teachers. The program currently used in our research is a revised version of the training modules based on the Swinburne emotional intelligence model described by Hansen et al. (2007). Considering the links between higher levels of EI, lower occupational stress, and increased psychological and physical wellbeing (Chan, 2006; Gardner, 2005; Nikolaou, 2002; Pau & Croucher, 2003; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002; Slaski & Cartwright, 2003), there is considerable potential in exploring options for increasing EI in teachers. The purpose of this investigation is to provide further empirical support for EI training with pre-service teachers (individuals in teacher's college) as this is a critical time to focus on enhancing EI skills with the further intention of preventing negative outcomes related to both teacher health and wellbeing.

‘Teachers-in-training’ or pre-service teachers are particularly ‘vulnerable’ to the multitude of stressors found in the early years of their careers, which is likely a major reason such a large number leave teaching within the first 5–6 years. Palomera and colleagues (2008) have argued that pre-service teacher training programs are the “priority educational context” for developing emotional competencies in teachers in the short term but also for promoting ongoing personal and professional development. Kyricacou (2001) further recommended that research is required to assess the effectiveness of particular intervention strategies directed at reducing teacher stress. While there are many programs that have found their way into schools, few are theoretically grounded or have been empirically evaluated. This has led Jennings and Greenberg (2009) to call for a systematic research agenda to address and evaluate the potential efficacy of teacher intervention strategies that are intended to promote their social and emotional competence.

Consistent with the discussed literature, it was expected that those pre-service teachers who completed the five week EI training program would show significant increases in both measures of EI as well as measures of resiliency, efficacy, wellbeing, and alternatively, decreases in self-reported stress and anxiety. In contrast, and as expected, we predicted the control group would not show significant changes in any of the measures from pre to post testing.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 49 undergraduate teacher candidate students (89% female) with a mean age of 26.5 years (SD = 6.19) who were recruited from two large Canadian universities. Participants from one university comprised the group who received the EI training program (N = 23) and those from the other university served as control subjects (N = 26). Participants in the EI group completed the battery of measures at the start and end of the EI program (pre and post-test) as well as at one-month follow-up. Those in the program group participated in five consecutive weeks of an EI program, each consisting of a group session approximately one and a half hours in length, utilizing a workshop format, group discussion, and workbook exercises followed by home assignments (e.g., skill practice). The skill development program was based on the Swinburne EI model consisting of modules on emotional self-awareness and expression, emotions attached to awareness of others, reasoning, self-management, management of others, and self-control. The control group completed the online questionnaire portion of the study, completing measures on only two occasions corresponding to the pre- and post-test times of the EI group.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Demographics questionnaire (DQ)

The DQ is a brief questionnaire providing information on age, sex, gender, previous education, grades, ethnicity, language, and extracurricular activities.

2.2.2. Emotional intelligence (EI)

Two measures of EI were used in this study to capture different perspectives. The *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Short Form* (TEIQue–SF; Petrides, 2009) is a 30-item scale that provides a global trait EI score. A 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*), is used to assess the individual's self-perceived abilities and behavioural dispositions. Cooper and Petrides (2010) reported high levels of internal consistency (α = .89 for men; α = .88 for women) for global trait EI. The second EI measure used was the *Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* (WLEIS; Wong, Wong, & Law, 2007), which is a self-report EI measure with four ability dimensions based on the appraisal, understanding, expression, and management of emotion in the self and others. This scale contains 16 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). There are four subscales in the questionnaire: Self Emotion Appraisals, Others' Emotion Appraisals, Regulation of Emotion, and Use of Emotion. Alpha coefficients for total score have been reported to be .86 overall with .86 for males and .87 for females (Shi & Wang, 2007).

2.2.3. Stress

The 10-item *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) asks respondents about the frequency of specific stress related feelings and thoughts during the past month. Responses are made on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). Cohen and colleagues (1988) reported an alpha coefficient of .78.

2.2.4. Anxiety

The Overall Anxiety Severity and Impairment Scale (OASIS; Norman, Cissell, Means-Christensen, & Stein, 2006) is 5-item questionnaire (self-report) that measures the severity and impairment of anxiety (for clinical and nonclinical samples). Responses are recorded on a scale of 0–4. The OASIS developers reported a coefficient alpha of .80.

2.2.5. Teacher efficacy

The *Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale – Short Form* (TSES-SF; Tschannen-moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) is a 12-item measure that assesses teacher competence and task demands in particular teaching contexts. The TSES yields scores on three dimensions of teacher efficacy (Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, and Student Engagement). Items are rated on a 9 point scale Likert scale ranging from "nothing" to "a great deal". The scale has good internal consistency, with Cronbach alphas ranging from .90 for total score and from .81 to .86 for each subscale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

2.2.6. Satisfaction with life

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWL; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a five-item measure that generates a global life-satisfaction score using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale has been shown to be .87 (Diener et al., 1985).

2.2.7. Resiliency

The Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents – Adult Version Revised (RSCA-A-R; Saklofske et al., 2013) is a modified version of the *Resiliency Scale for Children and Adolescents* (RSCA; Prince-Embury, 2007), which has included eight additional items intended to characterize the appropriate developmental trajectory of adults (added to the *Sense of Mastery scale*). It assesses the core constructs found to underlie personal resiliency. The RSCA-A-R contains 72 items and three global scales, with 28 items for *the Sense of Mastery scale*, 24 items for the *Sense of Relatedness scale,* and 20 items for the *Emotional Reactivity scale.* Participants indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale. Cronbach alpha coefficients are 0.91 (*Sense of Mastery*), 0.93 (*Sense of Relatedness),* and 0.91 (*Emotional Reactivity*; Saklofske et al., 2013).

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics, internal consistencies and intercorrelations

Descriptive statistics for all the variables of the current study are presented in Table 1. The Coefficient alpha values for the variables used in the study ranged from .83 to .92. Alpha values for each variable are presented in Table 2.

As can be seen from Table 1, the control group showed minimal and non-significant differences with only minor random changes over the two testing periods. Thus, the major statistical comparisons

Table 1
Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) for treatment (*N* = 23) and control groups (*N* = 26).

Variable	Group	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3		Sig.*
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
TEIQue-SF	Treatment	146.39	27.97	154.73	26.69	158.35	27.38	$F(2,44) = 2.94$, $p = .063$
	Comparison	159.20	13.46	155.04	13.30			n.s.
WLEIS	Treatment	83.17	12.92	89.39	12.24	89.56	14.81	$F(2,44) = 7.75$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .26$**
	Comparison	86.46	9.88	87.08	9.56			n.s.
SWLS	Treatment	26.43	5.29	27.57	5.09	28.00	5.28	$F(2,44) = 1.99$, $p = .15$
	Comparison	26.57	5.83	26.62	5.49			n.s.
PSS	Treatment	15.13	7.67	13.96	6.98	14.35	8.52	$F(2,44) = .36$, $p = .69$
	Comparison	15.23	6.46	15.04	6.12			n.s.
OASIS	Treatment	4.83	4.53	5.69	3.77	5.22	4.29	$F(2,44) = .56$, $p = .57$
	Comparison	4.77	3.00	4.70	3.11			n.s.
TSES	Treatment	84.09	14.09	91.26	13.33	86.61	15.48	$F(2,44) = 4.15$, $p = .022$
	Comparison	85.96	10.10	86.69	8.47			n.s.
RSYA (M)	Treatment	81.43	11.71	85.73	13.47	87.91	17.47	$F(2,44) = 5.48$, $p = .008$
	Comparison	80.08	12.93	81.23	11.00			n.s.
RSYA (ER)	Treatment	27.52	12.17	26.22	12.19	24.65	12.29	$F(2,44) = 2.10$, $p = .14$
	Comparison	24.46	9.11	24.20	9.12			n.s.
RSYA (SR)	Treatment	72.00	13.27	76.48	13.95	73.96	15.35	$F(2,44) = 2.82$, $p = .07$
	Comparison	75.81	7.88	74.89	9.77			n.s.

* F-test results are for the one-way repeated measures ANOVA for the treatment group.
** Significant < Sidak corrected $\alpha = 1-(1 - .05)1/9 = .0057$.

Table 2
Reliability coefficients.

Variable	Coefficient alpha
TEIQue-SF	.88
WLEIS	.90
SWLS	.87
PSS	.83
OASIS	.90
TSES	.90
RSYA (M)	.92
RSYA (ER)	.87
RSYA (SR)	.90

Note: Reliability estimates based on pre-test data.

were only made for the EI treatment group, looking at changes observed across the three testing periods. For this treatment group, the results of the one factor repeated measures ANOVAs (using Sidak corrections for multiple comparisons) revealed that only the WLEIS demonstrated a statistically significant overall mean difference between the pre-test and post 1 and 2 scores over the course of the program. There were trends in the predicted directions for the TEIQue, teacher efficacy, and RSCA-A-R Mastery subscale, but the lack of statistical significance could be partially due to a reduction of power as a result of the small sample size.

Correlations among all of the variables used in the study are presented in Table 3. The correlations for both EI measures in relation to the other measures assessing stress, anxiety, efficacy, resiliency, and satisfaction with life are as expected in both magnitude and direction. However, the two EI measures showed only a moderate correlation of .60 suggesting that EI is to an extent, differently defined and assessed by each measure and that it is important, in further studies, to target the EI measures with the particular content of the program.

4. Discussion

The present study examined some preliminary effects of an emotional intelligence program on a number of both positive and negative psychological variables in a sample of pre-service teachers. Given the non-significant and essentially unchanged score differences shown by the control group across testing periods, the results discussed here are in reference to the group who participated in the EI program across the three assessment periods. Results indicate that this group had higher self-report scores on both EI scales although only the WLEIS showed a significant increase following the program and over a one month period. These results are encouraging, as the Swinburne program does not directly map onto either the WLEIS or TEIQue, but rather is built around the broad foundations of EI including, awareness of emotions in oneself and others, reasoning with emotions, self-management and self control of emotions, and management of emotions in others.

While it would not be expected that major or even enduring changes in EI or any of the other measures would occur following five weekly program sessions, teacher efficacy and the mastery subscale of the resilience measure also show a trend toward increasing, following the completion of the program. Although these were students training to be teachers who had practicum opportunities but not regular classroom experience, the observation of small changes in self reported efficacy and increased sense of mastery again provides some support for exploring further the introduction of EI skills training during the pre-service period. Previous research showing that EI is related to positive psychological factors and inversely correlated with stress, anxiety, and depression adds to the potential relevance of EI training for pre-service teachers.

4.1. Implications, limitations, and future directions

The lack of statistical significance may be partially due to a reduction of power given the small size of the sample. However, the results provide us with a starting point from which to begin to more effectively examine and potentially address teacher health, wellbeing, and, in turn, student and classroom outcomes. Emotional intelligence does appear to be responsive to training and the current Swinburne model provides a strong foundation on which to build a more elaborate and effective training program (Parker et al., 2009),

A refined program is currently being developed by the authors to more specifically and directly focus on EI and, as a result, more effectively target critical psychological health outcomes such as resilience and efficacy while enhancing coping and stress reduction strategies. Changes to the program organization are also being made in response to minor difficulties experienced with implementation (logistical) as well as by increasing interactional group activities and improving integration between EI skills. Future rounds of implementation will also include a program evaluation component of the specific elements of the program, in addition to outcome variable measurement. Secondary limitations of the current study include the lack of longer-term follow up in order to assess sustained or perhaps improved effects as time passes. This is important to note as the nature of EI is such that practice over time may improve the impact of these skills. Given that teachers are at high risk for burnout and ultimately for leaving the profession due to high stress levels during early teaching years, the next phase of our research program, employing the revised EI program with both pre-service and practicing teachers, will hopefully add further support to the early findings presented here.

Table 3
Intercorrelations among scales.

	TEIQue-SF	WLEIS	SWLS	PSS	OASIS	TSES	RSYA (M)	RSYA (ER)	RSYA (SR)
TEIQue-SF	1.00								
WLEIS	.60**	1.00							
SWLS	.45**	.41**	1.00						
PSS	−.56**	−.54**	−.38**	1.00					
OASIS	−.46**	−.56**	−.26	.75**	1.00				
TSES	.42**	.48**	.21	−.38**	−.39**	1.00			
RSYA (M)	.47**	.66**	.69**	−.44**	−.46**	.42**	1.00		
RSYA (ER)	−.60**	−.64**	−.43**	.43**	.48**	−.36*	−.47**	1.00	
RSYA (SR)	.57**	.58**	.48**	−.52**	−.54**	.32*	.58**	−.44**	1.00

Note: Correlations are based on pretest data.
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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