

Chapter

Teachers in the 21st Century: Emotional Intelligence Skills Make the Difference

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Abstract

Teaching is intrinsically an emotional practice, given the centrality of emotions in the teaching and learning process. That way, teachers in the 21st century increasingly have to have skills for responding to classroom emotional situations. Therefore, the way teachers shape and handle their emotional state and those of their learners is central to educational success. Focused on studies carried out that suggest teachers' emotional intelligence like a success indicator for a healthy pedagogical relationship, this chapter makes a reflective approach to the meaning of teachers' emotional intelligence skills in their professional activity (e.g., professional well-being, teacher-student relationship, and student academic achievement). Consequently, it will be necessary to integrate emotional skills in the pre-service teachers' curriculum as skills needed for teaching practice and also to build capacity and support students during challenging times that constantly changing.

Keywords: teachers', emotional intelligence skills, pedagogical practice, pre-service teachers' training

1. Introduction

In a society marked by the rapid globalization of information and knowledge, anticipating changes in education requires the interpretation of the necessary skills to be developed in teachers, for the benefit of training that meets their needs. To this challenge, others are added, such as the one currently experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic, which, since 2020, has caused changes at a personal, professional, and social level. All these changes require skills from teachers to face the difficulties of new contexts and ensure the success of the teaching and learning process.

Moreover, over the last years, social and emotional skills have been rising on the education policy agenda and in the public debate, specifically to the need to develop these skills in students. In the vision for education future in 2030, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) views essential learner qualities as the acquisition of skills to embrace complex challenges and the development of the person as a whole, valuing common prosperity, sustainability, and wellbeing [1].

To achieve this vision, a varied set of skills and competencies is needed, that would allow learners to act as “change agents”, among which are skills socio and emotional. However, it should be noted that good training of students requires good teachers’ training. Teachers are critical to the successful implementation of any new skills development approach, and it is important that teacher training is aware of and responsive to teachers’ personal and professional needs in building new skills. In this regard, for a teacher to be effective, their academic training is only complete when they acquire the knowledge that allows them to apply and develop emotional skills in themselves and in their students [2]. But for the majority of teachers, emotional skills development remains a matter of concern, since there is a lack of learning these skills in the academic curricula in teachers’ training.

In this sense, it is relevant to emphasize the meaning of teachers’ emotional intelligence (EI) skills in the teaching role, since their work requires a high level of sensitivity to their own and their students’ emotions. Thus, teachers’ EI facilitates an excellent quality of interpersonal relationships, provides a steady and wholesome classroom environment [3], and promotes higher levels of work engagement [4].

Recognizing that teachers’ professional performance is controlled by emotional behaviors, as teaching deals with emotional and cognitive, this chapter approaches a set of studies about teachers’ EI advantages in the educational context. So, a reflection is made about the relevance of teachers’ EI skills in the 21st century. First, a brief reference is made to the role of emotions in the teaching and learning process. Second, EI theoretical foundations are described, with special emphasis on Mayer and Salovey’s model [5]. Next, to highlight the importance of training to develop teachers’ emotional skills, different evidence is presented on the meaning of teachers’ EI in the 21st century, namely in personal and professional well-being; professional performance; teacher-student relationship; and student academic achievement. In addition, some scientifically validated intervention programs based on a solid theoretical model of EI are presented.

2. Emotions in the teaching and learning process

Teaching and learning are both immersed in emotions. The classroom represents a very complex social context where teachers and students continually interact with and respond to each other’s behaviors. Moreover, teachers and students bring their experiences, expectations, beliefs, and purposes to these interactions [6].

In the past, Platonic thought held that society’s essential task was to teach young people to find pleasure in learning activities, just as all learning had to have an emotional basis. Consequently, the OECD has included in the International Student Assessment Programme, the evaluation of students’ well-being. In this report, it is problematized whether students are happy, whether students feel part of the school, and how much the quality of interpersonal relationships influences their academic performance [7]. The evidence of such issues is centered on the understanding that students pass most of their time in a school context and that schools should not only be spaces for academic acquisition but mainly conceived as environments conducive to the development of personal, social, and emotional skills, indispensable for students to thrive and be happy.

In addition, neuroscience defends that the essential element for learning is emotion, as without emotion there is no curiosity, no attention, no learning, and no memory [8]. So, in the field of emotions, it is possible to state that is the basis of learning [9]. Emotions have a strong effect on learning: positive emotions can arouse

students' engagement and promote the acquisition of academic skills, while negative emotions can distract students from learning [8]. Thus, it is important to clarify that emotions can facilitate or hinder learning, and this which depends on the emotional environment or context that the teacher provides. In this context, it should be noted that the teachers' emotions have significant consequences on the students' emotions.

Teaching is a very demanding activity and requires hard emotional work. Since teachers frequently have to manage many emotional situations simultaneously in the classroom. The teacher provides students with emotional support, promotes a stimulating classroom environment, and manages disruptive behavior effectively during the teaching and learning process [10, 11]. Consequently, emotional challenges often origins their stress, frustration, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intention [12]. Therefore, the ability to use emotional processes adaptively or to be emotionally intelligent is a fundamental skill for all teachers [13, 14], as educational work also includes knowing how to be empathetic, and emotionally support students, whether in the classroom work, as well in students' problems. That way, teachers also have to know how to express and manage emotions correctly during classes, as well knowing how to recognize and identify students' emotions.

Given the centrality of emotions to the teaching and learning process, to be able to develop effective teaching practice, emotionally educate students, and remain emotionally healthy, teachers need to learn to be emotionally intelligent. Therefore, experiencing positive emotions may prompt teachers to build positive emotional connections with students, parents, and/or teaching staff members, leading to positive thinking and problem solving [15], which allows the teachers to effectively deal with some of the most typical classroom conflicts [14].

Considering the role of emotions in the teaching and learning process, the study of teachers' emotions increased notably in the 1990s, which led researchers to pay more attention to the relevance of EI in teaching work. Thus, the integration of emotional skills with the cognitive component is evident, according to the great importance to feelings and emotions in the education context.

3. Theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence

Salovey and Mayer [16], based on studies related to emotions, which show that they have adaptive functions, refer that the intelligence quotient does not encompass the competencies that contribute to intelligent and adaptive behavior, and that there are individual differences in the way individuals deal with emotions and organize emotional information. Thus, the concept of EI was elaborated by the authors from the literature on cognition and emotion, in social interaction processes, through a solid theoretical basis. That way, the EI concept is introduced in the academic world through Salovey and Mayer, pioneers in the EI study, and the first to propose a theoretical EI model, initially defined as "an ability to monitor one's own as well as other people's individual feelings and emotions, discriminate between them and use them in ways that guide thought and actions" ([16], p. 189).

When presenting the theoretical EI model that qualifies intelligence as emotional, Salovey and Mayer [16] argued that it would be important, for a broader understanding of human intelligence, to consider an area of expertise linked to emotional processing, referring to the mechanisms of perception the information contained in emotions, the regulation of their influence on mental activity and the storage and use of knowledge about this information.

Afterward, Mayer and Salovey [5] reformulated the EI model and defined EI as “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” ([5], p. 10). Each skill has a hierarchical organization, according to the complexity of the processes involved, thus, higher-level skills are related to awareness and management of emotions, and lower-level skills correspond to knowing how to perceive and express emotions.

It should be noted that there are numerous definitions of EI, this way different theoretical models were developed [5, 17–21]. However, despite different EI concepts, the different theoretical models have several common points [22]: all models tend to conceptualize EI in components, which can be understood as dispositional traits or as learning-dependent skills; many of these components are repeated in all the models, although they are understood as emotional processing phases (e.g., awareness and understanding of emotions, expression, and emotional regulation); and all models distinguish between an intrapersonal component and an interpersonal component, one that affects how we experience emotions in ourselves, how they impact us and what we do with them, and another that affects how we experience the emotions of others.

Despite the existence of various EI models, it is worth noting that Mayer and Salovey’s EI model continues to be the most widely used and accepted definition [23] since it is considered the model that presents greater scientific rigor [24].

It is important to note that Mayer and Salovey’s model understands EI as a competence that can be learned and developed, and that consists of the adaptive use of emotional information [22]. The ultimate goal of this adaptive use of emotional information is to solve personal and interpersonal problems, allowing optimal adaptation to the environment [25].

4. Teacher’s emotional intelligence in the 21st century

In three decades of EI’s scientific existence, this has been seen as an important component of teaching activity, and several studies show that EI is one of the personality traits that affect the teachers’ pedagogical practice [26, 27].

The emotional reality of teachers confirms that they exercise their work in a society full of imbalances from different origins and in schools that, during successive reforms, are slow to find an orientation that meets social needs, with high levels of stress involved in the educational process [28]. Thus, the work demands increase in recent decades forces teachers to emotionally adjust to the different roles that involve greater participation and decision-making inherent to pedagogical practice.

All social changes place teachers in situations that surpass them and for which they were not prepared throughout their academic training. The demands placed on schools today are not only formative issues but also emotional, personal, and social issues. Thus, it is evident that the needs of society in the 21st century are different from those of the last century. In this context, teachers develop their work activity surrounded by imbalances of different natures, which require great emotional skills in the development of their teaching practice [29]. The COVID-19 pandemic was added to this reality, which contributed more to the emotional wear and tear of everyone involved in the teaching process. Moreover, in the school context, teachers are the main emotional leaders of students, and their ability to perceive, understand and

regulate students' emotions and their own is the best index of the class's emotional balance [30]. That way, EI abilities complement the teachers' skills, and a growing studies number indicate that teachers' EI is particularly important in personal and professional well-being [26], in professional performance [31], in the teacher-student relationship [32], and to the student academic achievement [33].

Regarding personal and professional well-being it is important to understand that teaching requires the strategies applied for the perception, understanding, and management of emotions and that insubordination, confrontation with students, problems with the school, and loss of authority led teachers to the limit of their resistance. So, teachers' stress is "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of work as a teacher" ([34], p. 28). It should be noted that teacher stress, due to the influence it has, can lead to burnout or/and complete abandonment of teaching [35, 36].

Previous studies have examined a wide range of potential variables that impacted teacher stress, including the school environment, classroom, instructional factors [36], the loss of credibility in teachers' work, and the low social and professional status, among others, diminish teachers' ability to react in the face of such instability [37]. That way, being a teacher in the 21st century implies exercising a work that, according to social demands, proves to be an activity of constant wear and tear, with harmful consequences for physical and mental health. This constant wear gives rise to negative emotions, with four being the chronic emotions (anxiety, frustration, guilt, and anger) most felt by teachers [2]. These constantly lead to stress, depression, and burnout that result in personal and professional unease.

Studies show that before the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching was a stressful job, with close to 8% of United States teachers leaving teaching [38, 39], and with 40–50% leaving teaching during the first 5 years [36]. Also, data from the Teachers in Europe: Careers, Development and Well-being report show that stress is common among European teachers [40]. This report included teachers from all 27 European Union Member States, and teachers from the United Kingdom, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Turkey. It should be noted that the sample was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, during 2018–2020. The OECD ([41], p. 102) underlines those European teachers experiencing high levels of stress at work are more likely to report their intention to leave teaching and move to other careers in the five years that follow. Also, a systematic review, about burnout in Portuguese teachers, revealed the scarcity of studies in this country. Nevertheless, the results suggest that the incidence of burnout in Portuguese teachers is significant [42].

Furthermore, personal characteristics, like lack of EI are considered teachers' stress and burnout antecedents [35], and scientifically validated training programs prove that training teachers' EI skills are an effective technique to improve individual resistance to stress, as well as to combat burnout [13].

Therefore, EI constitutes a key variable to understand and improve the competence of teachers by favoring their adjustment and reducing the level of burnout they experience [43]. Different studies also show that teachers' EI is one of the personal resources related to personal and professional well-being: stress and burnout [35, 44], to work engagement [26, 33, 45], to general well-being [45] to teaching satisfaction [46], happiness and job satisfaction [27].

Regarding professional performance, studies elaborated in various countries show that EI plays a significant role in teaching [47], is positively correlated with teacher's efficacy [33, 48, 49], with teacher performance [31], and the efficacy for classroom

management [11, 50], and also the need to prepare for the management of unpredictable and difficult-to-manage situations (e.g., conflict) in the classroom context [29]. Other studies found that teachers who tend to have higher levels of EI employ the most appropriate conflict management strategies for classroom managing conflict [29, 51]. Therefore, teachers with more EI develop more resilient strategies to deal with setbacks and adversities that may arise in the educational context [4]. Besides, the results of 1281 Chinese school teachers also show that teachers' EI has a significant impact on professional performance [46].

Moreover, the comparative study between the teachers' EI of the United Kingdom and India demonstrates that an increase of EI levels leads to work productivity and effectiveness [32]. Also, a study with teachers from Spain shows that teachers with higher EI scores show greater coping resilience and higher work engagement levels [4]. Similarly, Wu and collaborators' [49] study, with Chinese middle school teachers, demonstrated that teachers' emotionally intelligent have a greater motivation to teach and fewer intentions to quit the profession. Additionally, the relationship between teacher EI and work commitment has also been studied, with IE having a positive effect on teachers' energy, focus, and persistence [26, 52].

As previously seen, teaching is an emotional activity, involving the teaching work a significant emotional charge to facilitate and optimize the quality of interpersonal relationships in pedagogical practice. According to Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal [37] teachers' EI has a medium and long-term impact on curricular achievements and student outcomes. Thus, regarding teacher-student relationships, EI make positive effects on interpersonal relationships [29], and studies show that teachers' EI influences good relationship with students [32], provide a steady and wholesome classroom environment [3], and is related to the promotion of an appropriate classroom emotional climate, which provides increased motivation to learn, and increased academic performance [50]. Likewise, Maamari and Majdalani [53] study show the importance of having teachers emotionally intelligent to increase students' EI and, also their satisfaction.

Moreover, teachers' positive emotions improved the relationship with their students [10] and provided the conception of a classroom climate that enhances cooperation, facilitating the increase of positive emotions and the creation of a classroom climate favorable to learning. Therefore, teachers' emotional skills in the pedagogical relationship generate emotions and behavior in students. Teachers increasingly respond to emotional experiences in the pedagogical practice, experiences that have serious consequences for the learning process. Consequently, teachers' EI skills also contribute to students' school achievement [10, 33]. Besides, teachers recognized the importance of EI and how it becomes a crucial constituent of the teaching-learning process [54].

That way, teachers' EI skills are what lead to positive educational measures in 21st century classrooms, and for teachers is the kind of skills that has the potential to generate actions that can change lives.

5. Emotional intelligence skills training: intervention programs for teachers

There are programs to reinvigorate and exercise teachers' EI skills, largely ignored in pre-service teacher training, about their practical application. Despite different studies demonstrating the meaning of emotional abilities in teaching [27, 29, 33, 50].

However, despite all this evidence, most teachers do not receive tools in academic training to deal with emotional situations. As previously mentioned, to develop new and necessary skills in students, for the 21st century, a socio-emotional education is defended, for the construction of sustainable humanity [55]. Though to develop these skills, it is essential to have emotionally intelligent teachers, aware of themselves, their abilities, and emotional needs, capable of genuinely promoting and enhancing a safe, caring, and well-managed teaching and learning environment, managing to increase and stimulate the development of these same skills in the students and, mainly, constitute the model for these skills.

Therefore, the inclusion of EI training programs for teachers should be part of their “pedagogical baggage”, for which it is necessary to constitute a relevant field of emotional knowledge in their training [29]. Teachers are aware of the need to work on emotional education in the classroom. However, they have neither training nor resources to develop it [56, 57]. In addition, several studies found that emotional abilities can be worked on and developed throughout life [58, 59]. So, EI skills must be learned by teachers, as classes are the emotional learning model with the greatest impact on students, and adequate levels of EI help to face more successfully the setbacks of everyday teachers working life that they are exposed to daily at school context.

To promote teachers’ work productivity, Moghanlou and collaborators [60] recommend training EI to improve skills in the workplace and everyday life. Thus, training teachers in their emotional dimension is relevant, through validated training to develop emotional abilities. According to Hernández-Amorós and Urrea-Solano [56] study, teachers also indicate the need for training in EI skills, especially in their initial training and throughout their professional activity.

It is important to emphasize that studies shows that it is possible to improve emotional abilities (identification, understanding, use, expression, and regulation of emotions), with these improvements prevailing over time [58, 61]. This way, through the application of a scientifically validated training program in emotional abilities, the different benefits observed in the trainees were recorded (e.g., increased happiness and satisfaction with life, decreased stress, physical problems, and cortisol rate, increase in their employability and increase the quality of family relationships), compared to individuals in the control group [58, 61]. What is relevant is that these changes prevailed after the training had ended, with its beneficial effects remaining after six months [58] and one year after training [61]. These programs confirm the relevance of the application of Mayer and Salovey’s [5] EI model in teacher training, demonstrating that it is possible to develop emotional skills in adulthood and that the learning made during training remains in the trainees’ lives.

Considering the studies about the meaning of teachers’ EI, several intervention programs for teachers were developed. Hen and Sharabi-Nov [3] through a study with 186 teachers, developed and studied a model, throughout a training course, to address the growing needs of teachers, to practice and implement emotionally intelligent learning environments. The results indicated an increase in teachers’ EI and empathy. Both expression and regulation of emotions predicted the development of empathy at the end of the course. The teachers’ reflective attributions indicated an increase in emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and understanding of the other.

The intervention program to promote teachers EI, developed by Vesely and collaborators [62] aimed to the reduction of teaching stress through the development of emotional abilities. The program includes modules of emotional self-awareness, expression, understanding, and management of one’s own and others’ emotions.

The results of this program shows that teachers improve their levels of EI after the intervention. Likewise, improvements have also been found in their levels of resilience and teaching effectiveness. The results even indicated lower levels of stress and greater life satisfaction after one month of the intervention.

Also, Corcoran and Tormey [63] intervention program focused on teachers' EI development through a series of activities that followed the EI approach applied to the workplace, based on the four basic emotional abilities: perception, assimilation, understanding, and regulation. The results show an increase in teachers' emotional regulation. In addition, teachers reported that, after the intervention, they realized the impact of their emotions and the emotional management of their students. Teachers also indicated that, since completing the EI training, they were more aware of their body language in the classroom, and how it influenced their students and used it to their advantage. They also concluded that they dealt more with an empathic approach to managing their students' problem behaviors after the EI intervention program. It should be noted that many teachers reported that the EI training helped them to improve their emotional management in the classroom. In this way, they modified the teaching method or changed the focus of attention depending on the students' emotions perceived by the teacher.

Another way to develop emotional skills in teachers is RULER (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, Regulating), a systemic evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning. RULER is much about developing a growth mindset about emotions (e.g., emotions matter for learning and decision making) as it is a set of organized skills that can be learned [64]. These skills, based on Mayer and Salovey's [5] EI model: Recognize one's own and others' emotions; Understand the causes and consequences of emotions; Label emotions with varied and precise vocabulary; Express emotions constructively and correctly in different contexts; and Regulate one's own and others' emotions. The development of these five RULER skills relies on four core tools: Charter (builds and sustains positive emotional climates by creating agreed norms about how people want to feel and how they can help each other experience those feelings); Mood Meter (improves self-awareness and social awareness and supports the development of a nuanced vocabulary of emotions and a range of strategies for regulating emotion); Meta-Moment (provides a process for responding to emotional situations with strategies that align with one's best self and support healthy relationships and personal well-being); and Blueprint (supports the development of empathy and conflict resolution skills, serving as a guide for reflecting on conflict and restoring affected communities).

RULER also includes an array of practices and routines designed to enhance children's and adults' lives and positively influence classroom and school climate. For these reasons, RULER is characterized as an approach (i.e., a set of guidelines, principles, and practices to guide social and emotional learning implementation and behavior) rather than just a program (i.e., planned activities) although sequenced and structured programming is one key component [64]. So, RULER is more inclusive as it is focused on the development of EI skills in the school community (school leaders, teachers, staff, students, and families) and it is considered one of the most prestigious and effective programs [65].

RULER training in teachers shows that teachers report higher vigor, dedication, absorption in their work engagement, less burnout, and they also had higher EI scores after training [66]. It should be noted that results of more than 60 educational centers, where RULER was applied, showed that there are higher levels of cordiality, affection, and social connectivity between students and teachers, as well as higher

levels of autonomy and leadership among students. In addition, after the training, teachers also focused more on the interests and motivations of their students [67].

6. Conclusions

The 21st century society is changing at a dizzying pace, and teachers' are facing increasing demands to prepare students for rapid economic, environmental, and social changes. Also, for jobs that have not yet been created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve social problems that have not yet been anticipated. This task represents a greater challenge in developing countries, where access to information and communication technologies is a privilege, and where inequalities have increased during the two last years. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic affected all those involved in the education process. Thus, if it was already necessary before 2020 to include emotional education in teacher training programs to develop emotional skills, it is now imperative that such training occurs. Therefore, the teaching system in higher education must be also oriented towards the integral development of pre-service teachers, in their emotional and behavioral aspects, to improve their professional performance in the classroom.

Knowing how to read the emotional information and think intelligently about them helps teachers to adapt properly to the events that live daily at school, both with students and with other teachers. Therefore, in recent years, studies have been developed that provide multiple evidence of how EI abilities influence teachers' personal and professional well-being. As seen, the results show that emotionally intelligent teachers have better levels of emotional well-being, professional performance, teacher-student relationships, and better student academic achievement. Thus, teachers need to have EI abilities developed, as these have an important role in the teaching process and in their own well-being. For that, different authors defend several reasons for implementing teachers' emotional education programs [26, 27, 29, 33], stating that emotional skills are essential to human progress. However, despite all this evidence, most teachers do not receive tools in academic training to deal with emotional situations, because in their professional training the academic aspect is prioritized instead of the human aspect. So, it is significant to emphasize the teachers' EI consequence in the teaching role.

For these reasons, throughout the chapter, evidence has been pointed out that allows us to observe the need to develop the teachers' EI as essential to their work. It is, therefore, necessary to have these skills as a complement to intellectual development, both being fundamental elements for the integral development of teachers. The development of emotional abilities enables teachers to better manage the challenges they face daily in their professional activities. In addition, they also increase well-being (e.g., with lower levels of stress and burnout). The importance of developing teachers' EI has been proven with the application of training programs. Therefore, teachers' training in emotional skills is central to the success of their pedagogical practice. Yet, although teachers' emotion is the pillar on which pedagogical practice is built, teachers' academic training has not adopted the emotional education construct as a central part of its assignment in most countries. Moreover, society is increasingly aware of the need for a specific curriculum in the field of emotional skills, mainly in the education area. In this sense, a new model of pre-service teacher education is needed that includes emotional education, as necessary training for future teachers'.

This review concludes with the need for restructuring pre-service teachers' programs since teachers' EI abilities must be considered and included in a compulsory subject of emotional education in the pre-service teachers training. Furthermore, also schools should provide EI training to teachers who face emotional difficulties. Therefore, teacher training policies should give priority to the inclusion of emotional education in the pre-service teacher training, for developing EI skills due to the significance they present in the teaching 21st century.

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