

Perceiving Emotions, Facilitating Thought, and Promoting Growth: Using Emotional Intelligence as an Effective Teaching Technique in the Freshman Composition Classroom

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Abstract: One of the key issues in teaching writing to students in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is that they come from diverse high school contexts. Some students have never been formally taught in English, and even those who were have very limited experiences because they learned English as a subject rather than as a mode of communication across the high school curriculum. Students also have individual learning styles, different personalities, and a myriad of learning disabilities that can make the rite of passage from being a high school student to a university scholar a nightmare experience, especially at the freshman level. This is where a teacher's level of emotional intelligence (EI) becomes the key element to resolve any problems students will face when transitioning to university students. Research suggests that students favor classrooms where the EI of the teachers is perceived as high. The purpose of this survey-driven research is three-fold: to briefly discuss the factors that complicate the teaching of writing in the MENA region; to describe, through action research, how emotional intelligence helps bridge the learning gap; and to understand, from the teacher and student's perspective, how emotional intelligence influences classroom effectiveness and chart its benefits from a pedagogical perspective. Teachers' emotional intelligence should not be overlooked as an important component for student learning, and should be promoted as a skill that needs to be developed for maximum teacher effectiveness.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, teacher effectiveness

Introduction and Research Background

The inception of this project comes from years of us working towards one critical question: How can we become better teachers? Having both once been mentees, to becoming mentors, and then later separately chairing the Department of Writing Studies (DWS) Mentoring Committee/Program at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), we understand that you can only mature as an educator when you constantly question yourself and aim to benefit from each and every student, and each and every classroom experience. While obvious professional growth comes from attending workshops, being trained on the latest teaching technologies, and/or learning how to adapt to varying teaching contexts, there is no greater source of benefit than the students themselves. A teacher who understanding students, considers their respective backgrounds, and is aware of their varying life circumstances has the potential to maximize learning in ways that workshops, conferences, and technological advancements never can. A teacher's level of emotional intelligence (EI) is a determinant factor of his or her effectiveness in the classroom.

When educators lack emotional intelligence, i.e. they do not approach their work with passion and empathy, they may be jeopardizing their careers and, more importantly, they might not be creating the optimal learning environment for the students that they teach. A teacher's level of EI directly impacts his or her teaching, and it also affects the level of interest and knowledge gained among students. This is especially imperative in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region considering the influx of foreign teachers that are present. Such people need to apply their teaching skills effectively so that they can retain their pupils and stay focused on their primary purpose: understanding student needs to create an effective learning environment. This research project was grounded in an effort to understand the impacts of EI from the perspective of both educators and students. The purpose of this research is (1) to explain the teaching of writing that is specific to the MENA region, (2) to gauge a faculty member's level of emotional intelligence at AUS and how emotional intelligence helps bridge the learning gap, and (3) to understand how much AUS students value EI as a preferred trait among their professors so that educators can use emotional intelligence to enhance classroom effectiveness.

This research was conducted in an English as a Second Language (ESL), multicultural context within the MENA region. The American University of Sharjah, where the authors of the study are both employed as full-time senior faculty, is located in Sharjah, which is one of the seven emirates in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.). AUS is a university that boasts of students from over 80 different nationalities. While the university definitely prides itself on being a progressive, multicultural learning environment, students at this university are primarily of Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian descent. AUS is a private institution that is primarily funded by student tuition. The university attracts more and more students every year because of its prominence in the region. AUS gained global recognition in 2012 when the London-based Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked it in its list of the world's top 500 universities, and a year later in 2013 it ranked in the 401-450 bracket ("American University of Sharjah" 2013).

The Conception of EI

The Intelligence Quotient (IQ) has been used as a method to determine an individual's potential success in most areas of life. Aptitude tests and school entry exams are based on this measure and it quantifies one's likelihood of success at school and/or work. A different perspective emerged in the mid 1990s with the concept of Emotional Intelligence. Candy Fresacher (n.d.) sees Goleman's book, titled *Emotional Intelligence, Why it can matter more than IQ*, as the seminal point from which the extensive inquiry into Emotional Intelligence began. Since then, "a continuing emphasis is being put on learning to better deal with the five areas that are important for a higher level of EQ [Emotional Quotient]: self-awareness, managing emotions, motivation, empathy and managing interpersonal relationships." The intelligence quotient, albeit still important and a viable method of measuring knowledge, is now becoming more complex with concepts related to the self and one's behavior. According to research by Stéphane Côté and Christopher T. H Miners (2006, 20), Emotional Intelligence (EI) yields positive effects on the success of businesses, and it has a similar effect on student/pupil learning (Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett 2007).

Emotional Intelligence (EI) Explained

But what exactly is Emotional Intelligence? According to Côté and Miners (2006, 3), “emotional intelligence can be conceptualized as the ability to grasp and reason correctly with emotional abstractions (emotional concepts) and solve emotional problems.” Individuals who have high EI are those who can correctly identify and respond to emotional clues that are projected by others. Unlike Cognitive Intelligence which predicts an individual’s potential through summative assessment measures, EI predicts a person’s ability to effectively interact and socially succeed. This type of intelligence “encompasses a number of personality traits, including self-awareness, self-discipline, persistence, empathy and compassion, and is considered a predictor of individual success at home and at work” (Humber 2002). With EI, a person’s social self and personality is now also a valuable factor in determining varying levels of intelligence. According to Sternberg and Grigorenko (2009), “some researchers believe that the social facets of intelligence may be as important, if not more important, than the cognitive aspects,” demonstrating the need for EI (ctd. in Crowne, 149). EI is comprised of four components: perceiving emotions, facilitating thought, understanding emotions, as well as one’s ability to manage emotions (Crowne 2009).

Emotional awareness is very important because it allows an individual “to match one’s affective response to a given situation . . . directly influence an individual’s cognitive organization, allowing information to become more easily accessible, as well as [help] the cognitive system to attend to information that is important” (Easterbrook 1959; Mandler 1975; Simon 1982, ctd. in Papadogiannis, Logan, and Sitarenios 2009). While cognitive intelligence is undeniably important, it is nonetheless less ineffective if a person is not socially competent. Cognitive intelligence combined with IE is what ultimately warrants success. IQ and EI complement each other and can especially bolster leadership performance in terms of business success.

Why is an Educator’s EI Important?

Research into the effects of EI in education has predominantly focused on students’ EI, with emphasis being put on the need to address the students’ potential beyond just their IQ. It has been aggressively argued that learning and one’s ability to succeed depends on a far more complex set of criteria than what the IQ test assesses. It is largely agreed nowadays that EI can compensate for a lower IQ. Individuals with a lower IQ, but who possess high EI may very well compensate for a lower IQ. Students who graduate in the top percentiles of their universities, for instance, often initially struggle to secure better jobs if their EI is not sufficiently high, demonstrating their lack of social skills. Graduates with lower Grade Point Average (GPA) but who possess higher EI usually market themselves better during interviews and are perceived as capable of blending in more effectively in a multifaceted work environment.

While there are many benefits of EI for students, what has been given less attention is the key role that EI can play for educators. An educator’s EI influences his/her effectiveness in the classroom and helps him/her achieve course objectives and outcomes. If understood in terms of one’s “ability to perceive, express, understand, use and manage emotions accurately and adaptively,” EI becomes a very applicable, if not essential, component of teacher effectiveness (Salovey and Piarro ctd. in Crowne 2009, 150). If an educator is to indeed cater to a multitude of individuals with different learning styles and varying levels of intelligence, then it is critical that this instructor possess the ability to tune into those individual student needs. Understanding the emotional mechanics of individual

learners assists in maximizing an educator's teaching effectiveness by allowing him/her to adjust his/her teaching strategies, and to motivate individual students in different ways to maximize success in their learning. Unlike other work settings, where EI might not be seen as overwhelmingly important, learning is directly enhanced by an educator's high EI. Côté and Miners (2006, 7) argue that "emotional intelligence should contribute little to [the] job performance [of individuals with high cognitive intelligence] because they already achieve high job performance." These observations are made in reference to a typical business setting where a person's daily output can be measured and quantified. However, the case is quite different in teaching where the instructor is already expected to have high Cognitive Intelligence (CI) but is more effective at his/her job when CI is coupled with EI. It is when the teacher taps into his/her EI and connects with the students through understanding of their various learning and cultural backgrounds that he or she can correctly perceive and process the students' emotions, which in turn leads to enhanced learning. According to Janet Pickard Kremenitzer, Justyna K. Mojsa, and Marc A. Brackett (2008, 194), "a teacher with higher EI will be able to establish positive, satisfying and supportive relations with the pupils that may lead to an emotionally warm classroom climate and in consequence student positive consequences." As the researchers suggest, a classroom environment is enlivened and enhanced through an educator's level of EI.

Presumptions about Educators and EI

It is often assumed that educators, by nature, are empathetic and understanding; i.e. that they possess high EI, but not all people who enter the profession are teachers by nature. Many university faculty, for example, land in teaching positions with either little or no prior formal training in education. They may be experts in the fields and subjects that they are teaching in, but do not necessarily have an aptitude for teaching per se. How does this happen, and why do people land up in such positions/situations? A variety of factors influence why someone enters into the teaching profession. In the competitive marketplace, universities find themselves competing for rankings which determine student enrollment numbers and often funding. Experts in a particular field may be sourced by educational institutions to lend their expertise and name to the credentials of that specific university. Their ability to actually teach is often assumed, but not necessarily proven. Others may hold full-time jobs and be supplementing their income by teaching evening classes on an adjunct basis. There are also those who are so interested and engrossed in a particular field of study that they pursue terminal degrees. However, once graduates, they do not know what job they should assume. Others, still, are only teaching so that they can pursue their research interests at a particular institution. Thus, it is not necessarily the first choice for such people to go into teaching or their high level of EI that leads them into the profession. For example, there are also those people who find themselves entering the profession by chance, but end up making a very positive impact on their students and do, in fact, become valued and highly successful educators. There are of course also those for whom teaching was a vocation, which they followed willingly and with enthusiasm, but over the years have lost that "loving feeling."

The consequences of having educators who do not approach their work with passion and empathy is potentially disastrous and leads to dire results. Students often speak of professors who are disengaged from the class and appear as if they do not care for their students. Some are criticized for not even knowing their students' names both during and at the end of a given semester where the classes are small and with a manageable number of students. Students are oftentimes reluctant to approach such teachers because there has

been little to no connection established. They also avoid registering for classes with these professors. Students usually have preconceived notions of their professor beforehand either through their friends, popular websites such as ratemyprofessor.com, or through social networking sites such as Facebook. At AUS, there is an entire student Facebook page dedicated to asking questions about particular professors. When interviewed, students commented that it is not the theoretical or technical knowledge of the professor that they question. The professors are indeed acknowledged for their expertise, but despite this, students still prefer to take classes with professors who are engaged, enthusiastic, and likeable because they feel that they can learn better from such teachers.

There are multiple reasons why teachers do not engage their classes. Lack of training has already been singled out as one, as well as lack of interest. Many professors are better at research and take up lecturing positions to pursue their research ambitions. Teaching, then, is something that they are expected and required to do vs. want to do. This is becoming even more prominent at institutions such as AUS which is becoming increasingly research-orientated in an effort to maintain and increase its QS world ranking. In some contexts teachers are simply overwhelmed. Classes may be overloaded because of financial pressures and are therefore difficult to manage. This is especially the case in science courses where lab space and lab equipment is detrimental to teaching. Despite varying factors, ultimately these teachers may simply be manifesting the lack of EI.

How Educators with High EI Function

Students face many challenges outside of the classroom in their new life situation as university students. Many of these are very stressful and can negatively influence the student's learning. The challenges they face can range from external factors such as living away from home for the first time, living in another country, having to fend for themselves, needing to fulfill scholarship requirements, and/or satisfying parental expectations. All of these external factors are indicators of why students may struggle. Alongside the external factors are also internal factors such as feelings of insecurity and varying levels of maturity and self-discipline. To add to this, if the atmosphere in their learning environment is not stimulating or overly stressful, it is unlikely that comprehensive effective learning will take place. Sadtrock's (2007) conclusions that "the ability of students to persist on a task was found to be associated with an induced happy mood [and] happy teacher," support this premise (cited in Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett 2008, 194). A student's success at a given task, whether it's a high or low stakes assignment, relies on his/her mental well-being based on individual external and internal challenges combined with an educator who is approachable and empathetic.

Teachers who understand the limiting factors to learning (other than variations in IQ), and who are sympathetic towards the students will understand that creating a relaxed educational environment will positively affect outcomes. When students do not feel the need to stress about a class, they realize it is more fun and they learn more easily without any perceived effort; therefore, "the ability to perceive and recognize students' emotions may be a valuable asset" because it enables teachers who are possessed of high EI to "take advantage of direct feedback about their teaching from reading and recognizing of their students' emotions and thus [being able to] immediately adjust to improve their instruction or management strategies" (Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett 2008, 193).

Another quality of an educator with high EI is his or her willingness to develop a more personal relationship with students. Fresacher (n.d.) argues that some degree of “self-disclosure can help empathy.” Teachers who are comfortable with their students and share anecdotal or personal stories establish stronger rapport with their classes. This contributes to greater trust and unity within the classroom community. In general, “the ability to understand subtle differences of the vast array of emotions that are ever present in one’s daily communications can facilitate not only one’s interpersonal relationships but the level of their personal and professional performance” (Papadogiannis, Logan, and Sitarenios 2009, 46). This is especially applicable in the field of education where there are daily interactions between teachers and their students. An educator’s adeptness is especially important because classroom dynamics are constantly changing from one class to another, from one semester to the next.

Implications of an Educator’s EI in a Multicultural Context

A context in which a teacher’s EI becomes of utmost importance is in a L2 learning environment where the students are not native speakers of the language by means of which instruction is delivered. At AUS, for example, English is oftentimes the third language that students speak. In this context, the “accurate perception and understanding of emotions in others” is essential and “requires some knowledge of the others’ background, including cultural background” (Crowne 2009, 156). Those able and willing to acquire cultural sensitivity, knowledge, and understanding of others are more likely to be effective teachers. In the 21st century classroom, student diversity is not an anomaly but rather a given. It is therefore critical that teachers understand and accept this as an essential component to their success as educators. Crowne (2009, 157) states that “being mindful of cultures is related to the ability to perceive and understand emotions because recognition of emotion involves accurately reading emotional cues. Additionally many cross-cultural interactions involve emotions, and any emotional situation involves understanding the cultural context.” In the Middle Eastern context this is especially important because the culture varies dramatically from western culture. While American culture is more individualistic and values independency, Middle Eastern culture is more family-orientated and has a collectivist value system. Teachers must become, if they already are not, aware that “both emotions and intelligence are psychological processes and are culturally defined. It is the culture, which moderates emotional intelligence. Therefore, it is concluded that understanding of emotional intelligence varies in accordance with the culture” (Shanval and Kaur 2007, 159). Teachers managing cross cultural classrooms with either a multitude of cultures, or where they themselves are of a culture different to that of their students have to be aware of this and learn to understand the cultural clues that their students are providing. This is important because “there is a visible impact of cultural differences on the intensity of perception and expression of the emotions as well as on the extent of the accuracy of their perception within the same and across different cultures” (Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett 2008, 198). What the authors mean by this statement is that when there are many different cultures interacting simultaneously, being emotionally cognizant is even more imperative because otherwise confusion and chaos can ensue from one interaction to another. Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa and Brackett (2008, 198) believe that:

the truly effective teacher would be able to perceive students’ emotions even if they come from diverse cultural groups and express his/her own emotions in a way that will be easily and readily understandable for students of all backgrounds.

The fulfillment of this requirement not only calls for higher level of EI, but also knowledge of the nature of the cross-cultural variability on emotional responses.

In an ideal educational environment, the primary focus of EI is on the educator who knows how to engage his/her students despite their various ethnic backgrounds. The educator is someone who appeals to students with interest and without giving any offense. The educator is someone who is attune to local cultural practices, is appropriate, and takes into consideration status quo behavior. Ultimately, the educator is someone who uses cultural differences as a mechanism to improve and enhance teaching vs. hindering progress.

Foreign ESL Contexts

The reason why EI should be emphasized in contexts where teaching/learning takes place in a foreign ESL setting is because “difference in expressing and perceiving emotions, stemming from different cultural backgrounds, may cause communication problems in the multicultural classroom” (Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett 2008, 198). In a situation where all parties may find themselves experiencing a greater or lesser degree of mistrust, this empathy will in time ensure the development of trust and thus create a more personalizing setting. This in turn leads to greater emotional support for the student, when/if needed.

A teacher who is possessed of high EI is more likely to adjust instructional methodologies and techniques to appeal to the needs of students; he or she optimizes results not despite of cultural differences, but directly because cultural differences exist. The end result is how Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett (2008, 194) argue that “teachers with higher EI will be able to establish positive, satisfying and supportive relations with pupils that may lead to an emotionally warm classroom climate and in consequence student positive consequences.”

The benefits of EI are more pronounced in an ESL classroom where the formative model of instruction is also practiced. With formative pedagogy, the focus or goal of an educator is not on the summative result (i.e. letter grade) that a student earns, but the process that a learner goes through to achieve specific learning outcomes. Learning thereby becomes a bilateral process between the instructor and the student. With formative assessment, the EI of the teacher leads to a stronger focus on individual learning. Students get more personalized guidance since the teacher singles out and responds to their personal individual needs and concerns. It is likely that such a teacher will provide better suited feedback in activities/tasks based on such a premise, since he or she recognizes and acknowledges the individual needs of a student. Ultimately, the presence of EI in this model of learning results in an enhanced ability to guide students more effectively towards developing a better understanding/appreciation of the course which they are taking because “teachers with higher EI presumably will be able to stay open to emotions and use their emotional knowledge to implement adequate strategies to manage the emotions of their students to enhance student learning and achieve educational goals as well as successfully manage their classroom” (Pickard Kremenitzer, Mojsa, and Brackett 2008, 194). Educators who use their emotional intelligence are aware that the key to student learning is to focus on the process itself. When an instructor has high EI, s/he can adequately identify individual student strengths and/or weaknesses and address concerns where necessary. This not only optimizes student learning, but also increases intercultural communication proficiency.

Middle East Learners

ESL teaching contexts differ greatly between different countries and regions of the world. The Middle East, particularly Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) are of great interest because these nations have experienced an economic surge during the past few decades since the advent of oil export. Gulf nations are currently a dynamic conglomeration of cultures and traditions where the expatriate population dramatically outnumbers the local population. In broader terms, the Middle East/North Africa region has been in the foreground of world news for various reasons. Some parts of the Middle East/North Africa region have continuously been marred by conflicts, so much so that peace and resolution are a distant dream versus a tangible reality. Palestine, Syria, and Egypt are perpetually entangled in political unrest and social crises. This inevitably has consequences on the welfare of the inhabitants and their opportunities to participate in education. The Gulf countries have economically benefited from these conflict-prone regions because well-off citizens with the means to immigrate relocate to affluent Gulf countries such as the U.A.E. where the sociopolitical situation is stable. Since Gulf countries offer personal safety of its residents, this has led to enormous strides that are being made in a multitude of fields, including education. New university campuses are continuously being established across these countries and schools are being built for the swiftly increasing expatriate populations. Most of these educational institutions follow a variety of international educational models and strive to adhere to international standards. This is dictated by two factors: first, the expatriate population who temporarily resides in the region but demands educational opportunities for their children that are compatible and commensurate with the West; and two, the local population who with their desire to globalize and compete are demanding no less than the expatriates. The U.A.E., for example, has for decades been on a national drive to promote education, has the highest literacy level in the Gulf region, and currently devotes approximately 25 per cent of total federal government spending to education according to the Library of Congress. Public education is free for male and female citizen children through the university level. Furthermore, “the Ministry of Education has adopted ‘Education 2020,’ a series of five-year plans designed to introduce advanced education techniques, improve innovative skills, and focus more on the self-learning abilities of students” (Library of Congress 2007). This initiative, along with new construction and other educational advancements, demonstrates the nation’s commitment to developing the minds of future generations.

Although public education in the U.A.E. is free, it is no longer considered to be of a standard that the very discerning U.A.E. Nationals seek. This is why there has been an influx of major international schools and universities establishing satellite campuses across the Gulf region (i.e. New York University, Michigan State University, Paris-Sorbonne University, etc.) as well as conglomerates setting up schools and universities that follow internationally accredited curricula. The growing number of major international institutions within the U.A.E. means that there is also a wave of teachers from all around the world, who may or may not be prepared for the cultural differences they will encounter.

Although Middle Eastern countries have been continuously producing an increasing number of their own teachers, these teachers are not enough to meet market demands. The other reason for ‘importing’ teachers is because they are familiar with the curricula that follow Western standards. Moreover, there is also the assumed perception that foreign is better. Students and parents alike prefer that teachers be native English

speakers. Many of these teachers have previously taught in ESL settings and thrive in this kind of environment. They see cultural diversity as not only a challenge, but indeed as a source of inspiration. Others, however, are drawn to the region because their home countries lack job opportunities. These teachers often have very little, if any prior experience of the cultural variances that they will encounter in their new workplace. Crowne (2009, 157) argues that “being mindful of cultures is related to the ability to perceive and understand emotions because the recognition of emotion involves accurately reading emotional cues. Additionally, many cross-cultural interactions involve emotions, and many emotional situation involve understanding the cultural context.” The key factor for educators is to understand that they need to immerse themselves in the culture to understand it better and also so that they can decode the emotional markers of students whom they will encounter in their classrooms. An educator who possesses high EI will transition into his or her new environment much more easily than someone who does not possess high EI.

Social Context of the Middle East

In the context of the 21st century, Middle Eastern students (in some ways) are just like students elsewhere in the world and in other manners differ greatly. At AUS, in particular, many students come from affluent backgrounds where there is a belief that everything can be bought (or is at least up for negotiation), including grades and diplomas. They frequently believe that they do not need to read or write and view these modes of learning as out dated, ineffective, or of no purpose. The latter is because the American system of education requires that general education courses, such as composition, be taken to obtain a bachelor’s degree. This system might be unfamiliar to students who matriculated from schools that follow a different system. Furthermore, obtaining degrees to many is less about learning and more about clinching a certain niche in the social hierarchy that they already belong to. Knowledge acquisition is often overlooked in the whole process and students are solely focused on the end outcome, the degree, rather than what it actually means in academic terms. Furthermore, students come from a society which is greatly protective and does not readily encourage becoming independent. Young adults are often incapable of looking after themselves both physically and emotionally upon completing their high school education. Transitioning to the demands and challenges of university is, to many, truly overwhelming. Having the ability to emotionally connect with these students is beneficial in helping students overcome many of the hurdles necessary that guides them towards effective learning. Fresacher (n.d.) acknowledges that “teaching others requires a high level of understanding of those in the classroom and how you, as a teacher, react to those students.” In fact “when [otherwise negatively perceived events] are interpreted positively, negative emotion is reduced, and the capacity to cope with the event is increased” (Stubbs Koman, Wolff, and Howard 2008, 42). This skill becomes critically important when connecting across cultures. Bringing a preconceived idea of teaching to a context that is foreign usually spells trouble. Someone who may have been an effective teacher in one place has the potential to fail miserably in another if he or she is not prepared to evolve within a new context. Such educators need to remain aware that “display rules governing emotional expression vary from culture to culture” and “that social behavior varies across cultures” (Gangopadhyay and Mandal 2008, 115 and 122). This is frequently apparent when cultural norms and mores are dramatically different. From the western perspective, for example, it is normal to talk more openly about topics that incite opposition and critical discussions whereas students from eastern cultures predominately look to agree with people and figures who are older and/or in positions of power. Indeed, “certain

emotions, such as happiness and sadness, are recognized equally across cultures. Such emotions as fear and anger, on the other hand are not recognized with equal magnitude across cultures” (Mandal, Saha, and Palchoudhary 1986; Russel 1994 ctd. in Gangopadhyay and Mandal 2008, 124). A lot of emotional cues are easily misunderstood because of cultural differences and also because nuances in tone go to the wayside depending on the type of speech. For example, the majority of ESL students who are in foundational composition courses more often than not do not pick up on verbal irony or sarcasm. Their limited proficiency in the English language makes them interpret language on a literal level.

Educators must not only adapt to changes in their varying social contexts, but also have the capacity and willingness to adjust themselves with each academic semester that is dependent on the class composition of each group of students. There is no static, formulaic solution for what works with one group of students and does not with another, even if the individual groups are seemingly similar and taking the same course. Teachers need to understand that a great variety of extrinsic factors influence the differences in how students function as a unit, and that “the presence of one group member with strong emotion [can] influence the emotion of the entire group” (George ctd. in Stubbs Koman, Wolff and Howard 2008, 44). This is why an educator’s EI is so vital. If a teacher does have high levels of EI, then he or she has the ability to change the attitude and perception of the entire class. It is ultimately the instructor who sets the mood and tone of the course. Furthermore, educators need to be aware that “emotion influences how individuals act toward others. The relationship between emotion and behavior leads to changes between the individual and the environment” (Folkman and Lazarus ctd. in Stubbs Koman, Wolff and Howard, 2008, 45). It may very well be their own emotion that is either positively or negatively affecting the class atmosphere. Nonetheless, other factors also play a role in how a classroom environment is established. The time of day when the class is taking place affects student performance, the location of the classroom on campus, and even the layout of a classroom can affect differences in behavior. In the context of AUS or other educational institutions in the Middle East, students may be exhausted and/or dehydrated from walking between buildings while getting from one class to another in the zenith of the day where temperatures readily climb above 40°C. Some classrooms are spacious and well air conditioned, whereas some are small and students are crammed into them with little space to move. Students can also be exhausted by the social demands of their culture such as observing the daily fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan. These variables greatly influence the students’ attitude when they arrive to a class and consequently shape the behavior of the class as a group. An emotionally intelligent teacher assesses and adjusts to the demands of every new situation.

Explanation of Research

We administered a total of two surveys; one to our colleagues in the Departments of Writing Studies and English, and another to select AUS students. The survey that was distributed among our fellow colleagues in Fall 2012 yielded a poor response. This can be attributed to faculty not having enough time and feeling already overloaded with their day-to-day responsibilities. It can also be because of low EI. While in an ideal world all educators should care about their students and want to understand them, the reality is that many teachers simply do not. In any given teaching context there are a variety of people

and personalities. As discussed earlier, some simply enter the profession because it is a viable option.

This research project was carried out over the span of one and half years and includes student survey results from ten sections of students from over three academic semesters starting from the Spring 2013 semester to the end of the Spring 2014 semester. All of the students who participated in the study were enrolled in a class titled Writing Studies 102: Academic Writing II (WRI 102). WRI 102 is an advanced composition class at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) and is the second of four required general education writing courses for all students pursuing a Bachelor's degree at AUS. This course was chosen because WRI 102 is currently the highest-level required composition course that our department (Department of Writing Studies) offers. WRI 102 students were chosen as participants because they demonstrate higher critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. They were also chosen because they have a comparable frame of reference among other courses considering that this is most likely not the first course or the first composition course they have taken as university students.

WRI 102 is a course that is offered every single semester (including the summer term) at AUS. There are approximately 55 sections of WRI 102 offered throughout the duration of a regular academic year. We chose to collect survey results from multiple semesters so that the data would be more expansive, but limited it to WRI 102 students so that student proficiency levels across participants generally remained the same. This gave us a capacious pool of data, but by limiting it to only WRI 102 students the data was also succinct and its analysis practicable. The surveys were distributed electronically through AUS' e-learning management system, Blackboard. Student participation was voluntary and was to be completed outside of class time. There were a total of 100 students who responded to the survey over the course of three semesters. Students were assured of their anonymity before taking the electronic survey.

Student participants were given seven questions, five multiple choice questions, and two open-ended questions. The multiple choice questions asked students to identify the characteristics they value most in a professor, what creates an effective classroom environment, whether or not students prefer that their professors are empathetic towards them, and whether or not students prefer that their professors are concerned about their academic well-being. The two open-ended questions asked students to identify the attributes that makes a professor approachable and to explain whether or not they value a professor's level of confidence. The survey was designed to not be too time consuming nor onerous for students to complete. Students were told that the survey would take no longer than ten minutes to complete, and they were ensured of anonymity.

Research Findings

The faculty survey (see Appendix A) that was administered in Fall 2012 was a standard Assessing Emotions Scale, sourced from Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2009). It is a "33-item self-report inventory focusing on typical emotional intelligence" which consists of 33 questions and "total scale scores are calculated by reverse coding items 5, 28 and 33, and then summing all items. Scores can range from 33 to 165, with higher scores indicating more characteristic emotional intelligence" (Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar 2009, 120); (see Appendix 1). This survey was printed and placed in the department mailboxes of every

member (excluding the authors) in the Department of Writing Studies (DWS). With approximately 25 full-time faculty members in DWS, we were hoping to have a sizeable amount of data that we could analyze. Unexpectedly we received a very poor rate of response and decided to then distribute the survey to our sister department, the Department of English, which consist of approximately 22 full-time faculty members. We printed and placed the surveys in their department mailboxes similar to how we had done for our own department. We received a total of only 12 surveys from both departments, which constituted a little more than 25% of the total faculty. As instructors who predominately teach first and second year university students, it is imperative that we have high EI so that we can help our students adjust to the university environment and teach them the tools necessary to succeed. Nonetheless, three quarters of faculty teaching courses that would benefit from a high degree of EI of the teacher appeared disinterested in participating in the study, demonstrating indirectly that EI may not be intrinsic to the profession. Out of the 12 surveys returned, all of them placed in the 100+ range on the 33-165 point scale. The lowest score was 64% and the highest was 93%.

Since the faculty survey results were not substantial, the primary purpose of the study which was to gauge a faculty member's level of EI at AUS was not adequately established. Nonetheless, certain presumptions can be made about this outcome. Since the surveys that were returned to us placed high in the point scale, it can be assumed that the faculty who completed them possess high EI skills. It can also be assumed that the traits associated with EI, such as interest in the students' welfare and engagement in their learning, motivated these individuals to participate in the study in the first place.

Our second aim, which was to understand what specific qualities AUS students prefer their professors to have, was properly defined using a short survey which comprised of seven questions (see Appendix B). The survey was created by the authors of this paper based on the following principles: Question one, regarding characteristics that students value in a professor, was constructed using terms that are deemed conducive to the presence of EI. To this antonyms were added to give a balanced choice to the survey takers. The next question sought to assess the students' perception regarding an effective learning environment. The terms included were deduced from what characteristics one would associate with a formative, student-centered learning model and were balanced with terms that define traditional, lecture-based learning model. Questions three to five were constructed on the premise that the ability to build personalized relationships is a byproduct of a teacher's EI and contributes positively to learning. We wanted to gauge whether students' perceptions confirmed what the literature suggests. And last, since confidence is also considered to be a signature trait of an emotionally intelligent individual, the last two questions of the survey sought to assess the importance of this aspect to our Middle Eastern students.

The data collected from the student surveys proved that learners value teachers who possess high levels of EI. For example, when asked what two characteristics they value most in a professor, 76% participants selected the term "approachable," and 58% said someone who is "easy-going." The lowest answers were for the words "meticulous" (3%), "formal" (4%), "demanding" (5%) and "firm" (5%). When asked to identify the five conditions that a student considers to be the most important for an effective classroom environment, students chose "encouragement" (78%), "interactive" (76%), "engaging" (76%), energy (60%), and openness (58%) as their top five choices with "distance," "seriousness," and "boundaries" ranking the lowest.

The student responses about what makes an effective classroom environment were consistent with student responses to the first open-ended question. The first open-ended question asked students to identify what makes a professor approachable. The key terms that kept repeating among the responses were the following: understanding, confidence, interaction, easy to communicate with, encouraging, engaging, and openness. One student said, "If he/she is kind but firm. Funny and warm but knows his/her boundaries. If they show interest in their students' work and general well-being." In the multiple choice questions, 56.57% respondents said that they prefer a professor who gets to know them, and 83.84% of student participants said that they like it when their professor is concerned about their academic progress. These findings support the premise that a professor who uses the formative assessment model of teaching to track students' progress and foster learning also possesses high EI. S/he is someone who gets to know his or her students, understands students in their various socio-economic and cultural contexts, and uses all of this as an effective teaching tool.

Two of the survey questions followed from one to the other. When asked to choose the one term that defines the word *confidence*, the majority of participants selected "expertise" and "self-worth" over "superiority," "strength," "stuck-up," and "relaxed." This connected to the last open-ended question which asked if students preferred their professor to be confident, and then explain why or why not. Students, for the most part, really value confidence as a trait because it builds respect and confidence among students, helps a professor teach effectively, and demonstrates knowledge in the subject that the professor is imparting to his or her students. Participants also stated that a confident professor helps students take the course more seriously. Although a hundred students responded to this question, one student summed it up very nicely: "Yes. [C]onfidence is the key to success. For professors to be successful at their job they should be confident, or else they might give the impression of not being good enough to teach. Thus students start losing confidence in what the professor is teaching, as they begin to doubt the credibility of whatever the professor says. In some cases students start disrespecting their professor." While respondents said that they value confidence as a positive trait among their professors, many took the time to define what they believe is a good balance of it: "Confidence is important, but it shouldn't be mistaken for cockiness. A confident professor demonstrates thorough knowledge of the subject via effective modes of communication." These findings are consistent with previous research which confirms that "acceptance in social relations . . . differs between high self-esteem and low self-esteem individuals. When individuals feel confident in themselves, they feel accepted by others, regardless of success or failure" (Baldwin, Baccus and Fitzsimons ctd. in Dong, Koper and Collaco 2008). If confidence is understood as being synonymous with self-esteem, then this confirms Harber's (2005) observations that confidence is related to emotional intelligence. An instructor's confidence, which translates into his/her ability to communicate and do so effectively, is at the heart of EI.

Limitations, Future Direction of Research, and Conclusions

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this research. While the faculty survey was sourced and is a standard Meyer/Salovey survey, the student survey was not. The goal of the student survey

was to create a document that was specifically geared to the students we teach and the EI traits that we, the researchers, find valuable based on the literature we reviewed for the purpose of this study. There were a total of only seven questions in the student survey because we did not want to create something that students would find too tedious to complete, especially taking into consideration that they had to respond to the survey outside of class time and did not receive “extra credit” or any other form of compensation. The majority of the questions were multiple choice so that the student answers could be quantified. We also chose answer choices that did not explicitly have positive and negative connotations, and those that were not loaded. For example, when describing a fish, to say that its eyes were “bulging” has a negative connotation whereas to say that its eyes were “protruding” does not. While we tried to take these various factors into account, nonetheless the multiple choice answers had their own limitations. For example, a student could have chosen a particular answer choice because he or she had come across that same term in an earlier part of the survey. This is true for the word “approachable.” In the first question, when students are asked which two characteristics they value most in a professor, “approachable” is one of the eight possible answer choices. In question three, which is a qualitative question and garners an open-ended response, students are asked to identify what they believe makes a professor “approachable.” Although the word “approachable” is not used as an answer choice in any other part of the survey, a student could potentially go back and change their answer to question 1 where “approachable” is an answer choice.

The Way Forward

Since this research data is limited to students enrolled in our specific composition courses at the American University of Sharjah, it would be beneficial to study student results across more sections, among more professors, or even conduct a long-term study that moves beyond three semesters to see whether or not the data results shift dynamically with time. This research would also be more conclusive if we could collect data from classes with professors who consistently have low student evaluations and investigate why the students rated the evaluations so poorly. These findings could then be compared with a professor’s level of EI, which for the professor with low student evaluations the level of EI would be presumably low. While such research is worth exploring, it is difficult to execute. Comparing our findings with similar research piloted at neighboring universities within the U.A.E. would also be of value.

In general, EI does not necessarily need to be perceived as something that is inherent and something that cannot be developed. Although many individuals with high EI are simply endowed with this skill, EI is also a skill set that is developed or enhanced. Time is one factor that contributes to the development of higher EI because “older individuals obtain higher emotional intelligence test scores than younger individuals” (Mayer et al. ctd. in Côté and Miners 2006, 4). The longer a person stays in the profession of teaching and continues to go through life experiences in and outside of the classroom, ideally he or she should be more competent in terms of EI.

Effective mentoring programs, especially in EFL settings, greatly contribute to sensitizing new faculty who have not been previously exposed to a particular cultural context and/or to cultural differences. This, in turn, leads to an improved understanding and willingness of the teacher to reassess and adjust his or her teaching methodology to better suit the learners in his or her classroom. It is argued that “because teachers deal with highly emotional situations on a daily basis in their work, developing their emotional skills

seems to be an absolute necessity” which emphasizes the need of EI among educators irrespective of their discipline or geographic location (Maslach and Leitner ctd. in Pickard, Mojsa and Brackett 2008, 195).

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the student survey results, we conclude that emotional intelligence is vital to a person’s success in the field of education. Student participants indicated that they desire to learn in an environment that is encouraging, engaging, and interactive. In addition, students value EI as a trait among their professors because they want to be taught by someone who is approachable, understanding, easy-going, and confident. They especially value confidence because it is a characteristic that students learn to respect and emulate for themselves. The literature we reviewed confirms that such traits are key to successful teacher-student communication. Effective communication creates a foundation from which teachers can gauge their students’ interest and knowledge, become more empathetic, optimize learning, and in due course be successful educators.

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Appendix A: The Assessing Emotions Scale: Teacher Survey

Directions: Each of the following items asks you about your emotions or reactions associated with emotions. After deciding whether a statement is generally true for you, use the 5-point scale to respond to the statement. Please circle the “1” if you strongly disagree that this is like you, the “2” if you somewhat disagree that this is like you, the “3” if you neither agree nor disagree this is like you, the “4” if you somewhat agree that this is like you, and the “5” if you strongly agree that this is like you. There are no right or wrong answers. Please give the response that best describes you.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = somewhat disagree

3 = neither agree nor disagree

4 = somewhat agree

5 = strongly agree

1	I know when to speak about my personal problems to others.	1	2	3	4	5
2	When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I expect that I will do well on most things I try.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Other people find it easy to confide in me.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important.	1	2	3	4	5
7	When my mood changes, I see new possibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I am aware of my emotions as I experience them.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I expect good things to happen.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I like to share my emotions with others.	1	2	3	4	5
12	When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I arrange events others enjoy.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I seek activities that make me happy.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others.	1	2	3	4	5
17	When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me.	1	2	3	4	5
18	By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I know why my emotions change.	1	2	3	4	5

20	When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I have control over my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I compliment others when they have done something well.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send.	1	2	3	4	5
26	When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I experienced this event myself.	1	2	3	4	5
27	When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
28	When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail.	1	2	3	4	5
29	I know what other people are feeling by just looking at them.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I help other people feel better when they are down.	1	2	3	4	5
31	I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles.	1	2	3	4	5
32	I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.	1	2	3	4	5
33	It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do.	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2009).

Appendix B: What makes a teacher effective? Student survey

1. Which TWO characteristics do you most value in a professor?

Easy-going	Demanding
Approachable	Humble
Meticulous	Firm
Formal	Dedicated

2. Which 5 conditions do you consider to be most important for an effective classroom environment to be established?

Interactive	Boundaries
Distance	Openness
Lecture-based	Patience
Engaging teacher	Discipline
Seriousness	Energy
Encouragement	Warmth

3. In your opinion, what makes a professor approachable? State briefly.

4. Do you prefer professors who take time to get to know you?

Yes	No
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5. Do you like your professor to be concerned about your academic progress/success?

Yes	No
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6. Do you expect your professor to be confident? Explain why/why not?

7. In your opinion, confidence means:

Expertise	Self-worth
Superiority	Stuck-up
Strength	Relaxed

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