Emotional intelligence as a basic competency in pre-service teacher training: some evidence

Raquel Palomera[1]**, Pablo Fernández-Berrocal** [2]**, Marc A. Brackett** [3]

[1] Department of Education, University of Cantabria, Santander
[2] Department of Basic Psychology, University of Málaga, Málaga
[3] Personality and Social Psychology, Yale University, New Haven, CT

Spain / USA

Raquel Palomera. Facultad de Educación, Av. Castors s/n, 39005, Santander, Cantabria, Spain.
E-mail: palomerr@unican.es

Abstract

This article calls for the inclusion of emotional competencies within basic competencies considered in compulsory schooling and in the objectives of pre-service teacher training that is now being designed within the European Space for Higher Education. Toward this end, we review current research on the fundamental role of emotional competencies, concretely, emotional intelligence (EI; Mayer and Salovey, 1997), on students' personal, social and academic functioning, as well as on teacher effectiveness and well-being. In addition, we analyze the multiple functions that educational legislation requires of the teacher. By presenting the scientific evidence for the predictive validity of emotional intelligence and its relation to present educational objectives, this paper seeks to demonstrate the need for developing emotional competencies in teacher education in order to enhance well-being and job performance, both in teachers as well in their future students. We propose pre-service teaching training as the priority educational context for this type of learning, which is also an indispensable requirement for later ongoing professional development.

Resumen

Este artículo reivindica la inclusión de las competencias emocionales como competencias básicas en la escolaridad obligatoria y en los objetivos de la formación inicial del profesorado que se está diseñando actualmente dentro del marco del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior (EEES). Para ello, se realiza una revision de las investigaciones más actuales en torno al papel fundamental que tienen las competencias emocionales y, más concretamente, la inteligencia emocional (IE; Mayer y Salovey, 1997) sobre el funcionamiento personal, social y académico de los alumnos, así como sobre la efectividad y bienestar del docente. Además, se analizan las multiples funciones que la legislación educativa vigente demanda al maestro. De esta manera, por medio de la exposición de evidencias científicas sobre la validez predictiva de la inteligencia emocional y su relación con los objetivos educativos actuales, este trabajo pretende demostrar la necesidad de desarrollar las competencias emocionales en los docentes con el fin de promover su bienestar y rendimiento laboral, así como el de sus futuros alumnos. Para ello, proponemos la formación inicial del profesorado como medio prioritario para dicho aprendizaje, así como requisito para la posterior e inevitable formación permanente.

Palabras Clave*: inteligencia emocional, competencias básicas, formación inicial, docentes, escuela.*

Introduction

The intent of European Community member countries to become a knowledge-based society, more competitive and dynamic and with greater social cohesion, has been given substance in the formulation of common educational objectives. Thus we are witnessing profound changes in the Spanish educational system at all levels, these are reflected in the development of new educational legislation. We witness the transformation of university degree programs and study plans in order to address impending integration into the European Space for Higher Education (ESHE), and a parallel process of modification in compulsory schooling (LOE, 2006), both of which are focused on integrated, competency-based development, on educational quality and on responding to current socio-professional demands. We are in a process of change and therefore of opportunities for improving educational options and their outcomes.

In the last two decades great interest has arisen concerning the role which affectivity and emotions play in education. Education professionals have understood the importance of feelings in the overall development of their pupils and in their own daily tasks, thus they are voicing the need to encourage not only the academic development of children and young people, but also the development of their social and emotional competencies (Elias et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003).

Although the ties between these developmental areas had not yet been well established, a recent meta-analysis of nearly 300 research studies has shown that socio-emotional education not only increases learning in this particular realm but also in academic learning (Durlak & Weissberg, 2005). On the other hand, emotional competence of teachers is necessary, both in general for their own well-being and for effectiveness and quality in carrying out teaching-learning processes in the classroom, and in particular for the socio-emotional development of students (Sutton & Wheatly, 2003).

The U.S. organization, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), has been promoting inclusion of the socio-emotional aspect in schools for more than two decades; along these lines, the U.K. Department of Education and Skills has carried out a study for the same purpose. The study consisted of identifying the most

effective methodologies for developing socio-emotional skills in children and in implementing a program, called "Every Child Matters" (DfES, 2004), to promote the inclusion, social cohesion, learning and well-being of children through education in these socio-emotional competencies. Similarly, teacher training for the personal development of these competencies has also been addressed, based on the idea that it is not possible to teach a competency which one has not acquired, just as it is not possible to have quality teaching in the absence of the teacher's own well-being. The study concludes by recommending explicit development of both social and emotional competencies not only at school but also at institutions which train teachers (Weare & Grey, 2003).

Following the conclusions of this U.K. educational model, this present study from Spain defends the place of emotional competencies in basic education, and therefore, in pre-service teacher training, through a brief review of the more recent research about the contributions of emotional intelligence in explaining the functioning and successful adaptation of humans, and through an analysis of the professional profile required of today's teacher.

The current importance of emotional competencies

The perception, use, comprehension and regulation of emotions, as well as their impli-cations in our daily life, have been studied for decades, although they have sparked growing interest in recent years (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Ciarrochi, Forgas & Mayer, 2001; 2006; Fernández-Berrocal & Ramos, 1992). After centuries of Western thought where the prevailing Cartesian dichotomy separates reason from emotion, science has demonstrated the fallacy of such a dichotomy (Damasio, 1994; Forgas, 2000). Several studies have explained how emo-tion affects not only the content of thought but also the very processes involved in thought (Bless, 2000) and in social interactions (Lupton, 1998).

The implications of these results in teachers' daily work are easy to deduce. Teachers are aware of the role played by emotions in their daily effort. Emotions and skills for coping with them affect learning processes, mental and physical health, the quality of social relation-ships and academic and work performance (Brackett & Caruso, 2007). Teaching is considered to be one of the most stressful occupations, especially because it involves daily work based on social interactions where the teacher must make great effort to regulate not only his or her

own emotions, but also those of students, parents, colleagues, etc. (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Unfortunately, teachers more often experience negative emotions than positive ones (Emmer, 1994). Negative emotions, for example anxiety, interfere in our cognitive capacity for processing information (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992), while positive emotions increase our creative capacity for generating new ideas and therefore our ability to handle difficulties (Frederickson, 2001). Positive emotions in teachers can increase teacher well-being and also the students' level of adjustment (Birch & Ladd, 1996). This positive affect may also produce a spiral effect which in turn facilitates a more suitable climate for learning (Sutton & Whealey, 2003). This is why the capacity to identify, understand and regulate both positive and negative emotions is indispensable in this profession, in order to use and generate emotions to our favor.

Much of the expectation that the study of emotions can contribute to improving education is due to the appearance of a new area of study called *Emotional Intelligence* (EI). Ever since Salovey and Mayer coined the term in 1990, the field of EI has generated a steady stream of studies and research. Currently, the debate on the formal definition of the construct, its discriminant validity with respect to other classic psychological constructs, and the development of reliable assessment instruments make up a large proportion of the studies being carried out. Elsewhere, another important line of research seeks to understand the effects of EI in different applied contexts. One of the consequences of developing this research has been greater social awareness of the importance of proper use of the emotions. This is reflected in an increase in the demand for training in emotional competencies, both in the educational context as well as in other professional arenas.

Training in emotional competencies is necessary so that both children (future adults) and teachers can successfully adapt. This is important not only for developing such competencies in the students and for preventing mental health issues in teachers, but also for creating favorable environments for learning.

Studies carried out in the line of positive psychology put forward the need to generate classroom climates of security and positive emotions in order to encourage students' development and well-being, or happiness (Seligman, 2005). According to the classic definition by Diener, Sandvik and Pavot (1991), happiness refers to the experience of positive emotions during a large proportion of the time, as compared to the amount of time when we are feeling

negative emotions. Today we know that positive emotions encourage learning and the attainment of significant interpersonal relationships (Lyubomirsky, Diener & King, 2005), as well as many other benefits. It has been observed that an adequate school climate presents positive effects on the psychological adjustment of students (Kuperminc, Leadbeater & Blatt, 2001; Roeser & Eccles, 1998), being associated with healthy development, optimal learning and decreased maladjusted behaviors (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons & Blatt, 1997; Westling, 2002). It is therefore important to ensure that teachers are able to create a positive atmosphere in their classrooms in order to encourage development and learning, in addition to their students' well-being.

Contributions of Emotional Intelligence to the ability-based model

The current study builds on the theoretical perspective of Mayer and Salovey's (1997) EI model, the scientific approach which has the most empirical support and the most well-founded theoretical basis (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000). From this model, EI encompasses a set of abilities related to the emotional processing of information. The most widely accepted definition describes EI as "the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

There is evidence that EI is a significant predictor of an individual's social and personal functioning (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2005a; Schutte et al., 2001). One of the most active lines of research seeks to establish the predictive usefulness of EI in different areas of life among youth (for a more complete review, see Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera & Palomera, 2008). For example, EI has been found in relation to a lower rate of maladjusted behaviors, such as disruptive and aggressive conduct (Bohnert, Cmic & Lim, 2003; Gil-Olarte, Palomera & Brackett, 2006), risk behaviors, such as drug use (Trinidad & Johnson, 2002) and reckless driving (Brackett, Mayer & Warner, 2004). But above all, EI has been related significantly and positively to increased adapted behavior such as: higher quality social relationships (Gil-Olarte, Palomera & Brackett, 2006; Lopes, Brackett, Nezlek, Schütz, Sellin & Salovey, 2004; Lopes, Salovey & Straus, 2003), longer retention in the educational system (Parker, Hogan, Eastabrook, Oke & Word, 2006), prosocial behavior (Lopes, Salovey, Côté & Beers, 2005), better academic performance (Brackett, Mayer & Warner, 2004; Gil-Olarte, Palomera & Brackett, 2006), more satisfaction in life (Extremera & Fernández-

Berrocal, 2005b; Palmer, Donaldson & Stough, 2002; Palomera & Brackett, 2006), the use of better adapted coping strategies (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006; Gohm & Clore, 2002), better mental health (Fernández-Berrocal, Alcaide, Extremera & Pizarro, 2006) and a greater capacity for interrupting negative emotional states and prolonging positive ones (Salovey, Stroud, Woolery & Epel, 2002; Williams, Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera, Ramos & Joiner, 2004). Children with high EI are more positively viewed by their peers and teachers, as children with more prosocial behavior and less aggressive, dependent or intimidating behavior with others (Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham & Frederickson, 2006). Similarly, students with greater EI cope better with the transition from primary to secondary school, with better academic results, better self-assessment, better attendance and more well-adjusted behavior, as compared to their classmates with low EI (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson & Pope, 2007).

Recently the relationship between EI and the teacher's personal adjustment and well-being has come under analysis. In a study carried out with secondary teachers in England, it was observed that the teacher's EI predicts level of burnout (Brackett, Palomera & Mojsa, under way), confirming a recent study where teachers' ability to regulate emotions was related to their perceived levels of depersonalization, self-realization, and emotional wear (Mendes, 2003). At the same time, teachers with high EI use more positive, well-adapted coping strategies when dealing with different sources of stress at school, and they feel greater satisfaction with their work. This influence of EI on stress levels and work satisfaction seems to be mediated by a greater amount of positive affect which the teacher experiences, and by the support of school authorities (Brackett, Palomera, & Mojsa, under way).

Burnout has been shown to have negative repercussions not only on the teacher's well-being but also on the teaching-learning processes in which he or she is immersed. Prior studies show that burnout negatively influences student performance and quality of teaching (Vanderberghe & Huberman, 1999) and negatively affects interpersonal relations between student and teacher (Yoon, 2002). It is not surprising, then, that teachers identify the ability to regulate their emotions as an indispensable competency in order to reach academic goals, build positive social relationships and control classroom processes (Sutton & Harper, in press). On the other hand, training in emotional competencies for new teachers has proven effective not only in increasing their own emotional competency, but also in predicting a well-adjusted transition from the role of student to that of professional life (Byron, 2001).

The professional profile of today's teacher

Understanding the professional profile of today's teacher, from a descriptive educational model, involves analyzing competencies which ought to be developed in order to respond to the demands of society within our specific context and at this specific point in history.

In order to design pre-service teacher training, it is necessary to understand the basic content and competency objectives which future teachers are to develop in their students. The study of basic competencies is not new, although recently it has progressed at a rapid pace: from the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien (1990) where the World Declaration on "Satisfying Basic Learning Needs" was formulated, to the Project DeSeCo (Rychen & Salganick, 2001), PISA (OECD, 2002), and Eurydice (2002), to mention the more significant projects within our European context which seek to assess and promote effective, quality education.

During this entire process, different terms have been used to refer to the *set of cognitive, procedural and attitudinal skills which can and should be acquired over the course of compulsory education by the majority of students, and which are indispensable for ensuring personal and social functioning and adaptation to lifelong needs, as well as the effective exercise of citizen rights and duties* (Rychen & Salganik, 2001), what today we call "basic competencies". Selection of these key competencies in most European contexts has been performed using the three criteria of DeSeCo (Rychen & Salganik, 2001):

−   Contribute to valued outcomes for societies and individuals.
−   Help individuals meet important demands in a wide variety of contexts.
−   Be important not just for specialists but for all individuals, regardless of sex, social condition, and family environment.

Using these criteria, we can include emotional competencies within basic life competencies, since as we have seen, they contribute to valued outcomes for societies and individuals, they are applicable in all socio-educational environments, and they facilitate overcoming obstacles and meeting goals, encouraging the adequate functioning of all individuals. Furthermore, developing these competencies is not only beneficial for all children

and teachers, but it also particularly benefits those students with specific educational needs (Obiakor, 2001; Poeduvicky, Truene & Sperlazza, 2006) and it encourages intercultural adjustment (Yoo, Matsumoto & LeRoux, 2006).

The current educational system seeks to reinforce students' overall education and to help them acquire needed abilities for participating autonomously, responsibly, and with a critical attitude in a society which is undergoing constant change. Functioning adequately in 21st century society requires such indispensable elements as personal development and well-being, in addition to basic cultural skills related to verbal expression and comprehension, to reading, writing, and arithmetic, and the development of social skills, work and study habits, an artistic sense, creativity and affectivity.

In order to meet these educational objectives, both generally and in terms of competencies, government has paid special attention to the pre-service training and ongoing development of teachers, a reform which must be carried out in coming years under the new ESHE, in response to the needs and new demands which the educational system is facing.

The White Book on the *Título de Grado de Magisterio* [Primary Education Degree] (ANECA, 2005), after an extensive study involving the participation of practicing teachers, presents a selection of competencies that should be acquired by all graduates in Primary Education (i.e. future teachers). According to this study which focused on professional demands, today's teacher should be able to demonstrate: good intellectual, moral, emotional and social development and be able to promote the same among a diverse study body, in addition to knowing how to work with the entire educational community, how to investigate within their own setting, and provide proper school management.

In the same line, current educational legislation describes teaching functions for compulsory schooling (LOE, 2006), presenting a multidimensional teacher profile, where the teacher appears as a dynamic educational agent who, together with his or her colleagues and students' families, performs not only tasks of preparing and executing the teaching function, but also of mediation, innovation, management, research, assessment and guidance.

The teacher is placed as the central axis of the educational community and therefore as coordinator for an entire network of interpersonal relationships and educational processes

which are found therein. It is therefore not surprising that social and emotional competencies are considered worldwide to be a basic aspect in preparing for a "knowledge society", where the ability to collaborate, communicate, create and live in community are highly valued (Hawkey, 2006).

The many roles being required of teachers forces us to reconsider pre-service teacher training, which traditionally has focused on teaching specific knowledge and processes, but not on basic personal and interpersonal competencies which provide the future teacher with sufficient autonomy to address his or her own ongoing learning, to solve problems common to the profession and to meet imposed educational objectives. On this point we wish to applaud the inclusion of basic competencies in university education, but we regret the explicit exclusion of emotional competencies as basic competencies, precisely because they *are* basic to successful performance of any activity relating to the human being.

Conclusion

Research results with regard to emotions and EI lead us to assert that emotional competencies are basic competencies that facilitate adequate adjustment personally, socially, academically, and in the work world. The main objective of this article has been to call attention to the urgent need to explicitly include training in emotional competencies within minimum educational objectives for compulsory education.

However, although there is broad consensus on the importance of emotional competencies, there are obstacles to implementing this training at school, since to successfully do so requires the involvement and collaboration of the entire educational community (Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). For example, according to CASEL, initiatives for integrating these competencies at school require adequate training (which should be eminently practical) for teachers and administrators, in addition to training the students afterward. This highlights the need not only for adequate pre-service and ongoing teacher training in order to encourage their own teaching effectiveness, but also the need to collaborate closely between teacher training institutions, both for pre-service training and ongoing development, the actual schools themselves, and the administration.

Pre-service training is undoubtedly basic to the professional development of the teacher, thus constituting an important instrument for achieving quality education. Furthermore, we consider that resources acquired during pre-service training serve as a basis for ongoing teacher development, a constant requirement for every professional.

Now is the time, when universities are formulating new study plans to prepare European professionals for 21st century society, that we must decide how to train teachers that will be able to make a worthy response to the multiplicity of functions and educational demands described. To do so, we must explicitly include emotional competencies in study plans leading to the degree in Primary Education, not only as crossover competencies for the teacher's socio-personal adjustment, but also as specific teaching tools for generating suitable environments for learning and collaboration as well as for encouraging the emotional development of students. For the latter, the teacher must be able to program educational activities and use methodologies designed for this purpose.

In conclusion, pre-service teacher training must include emotional competencies if we wish to be coherent with what research teaches us, with what educational legislation requires of us, and with the model of European society which we pursue.

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