

Being an Emotionally Intelligent Teacher: Implications for the Teachers' Social Role

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Introduction: The notion of Emotional intelligence

Recently there has been a growing interest in the establishment of broader educational agendas that not only addresses academic skills but also seeks to improve students' social and emotional skills (Metlife, 2004). Students, as citizens of the future society, need to develop competencies that would allow them to interact in socially skilled and emotionally intelligent ways. Students are not only expected to master knowledge and cognitive skills but also emotional and social skills that could become the foundation for meaningful and effective employment and engaged citizenship (Elias, 2003). In this context, a relatively new notion has been gaining constant acceptance and growing popularity: Emotional Intelligence.

Broadly, EI refers to abilities for identifying, processing and managing emotions in both self and others (Goleman, 1995, 1998, 2001). The notion of Emotional intelligence emerged along with other contemporary theories about intelligence, within a context of growing dissatisfaction about the inefficiency and narrow scope of traditional tools and theories about intelligence (Detteman, 1986). However, EI has accomplished, like few other domains of psychological investigation, to gather such an amount of attention that spreads not only within the scientific community but also in other public types of popular-nonscientific media such as books, magazines and newspaper articles.

Emotional intelligence has been connected with leadership, achievement, productivity and personal health. As Zeidner, Matthews and Roberts (2001) comment, EI has been claimed to be a "panacea" for modern business and the essential but often neglected ingredient of nursing, legal, medical and engineering practices. Emotional intelligence has also been linked with academic achievement and success and has also been considered as the tool to optimize educational reform to finally reach its full potential across all the levels of schooling. Emotional intelligence is also considered to be beneficial for society and the local communities. According to Cherniss (2001), EI enhances the effective implementation of prevention programs and helps children to find occupations that are most suited to their interests and abilities. EI can also assist children to have satisfying relationships with others, to value diversity and to become active and productive members of their communities.

Echoing the proclaimed importance of EI for students and the society contemporary research findings indicate the importance of emotional intelligence in teacher preparation programs (Hawkey, 2006). Emotional intelligence training has proved to be helpful for many types of teacher education programs including pre-service teacher education, induction experiences with mentoring, and alternative certification programs. EI skills were linked to classroom management for both novice and experienced teachers enhancing teachers' ability to facilitate a supportive and encouraging classroom climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Nelson, Low & Nelson, 2005). As asserted, emotionally intelligent teachers are able to design and deliver lessons that build on student strengths and abilities and establish behavioral guidelines that set boundaries and promote intrinsic motivation.

The mastery of EI skills is not only beneficial for the students; it is also important for teachers themselves. Emotionally competent teachers are able to derive joy out of teaching and feel more efficacious than others (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). EI plays an important role in the job-related subjective well-being of teachers indicating that teachers of high-perceived EI are likely to experience greater job satisfaction and less burnout and (Platsidou, 2010). When teachers lack the skills to effectively manage the various challenges they face, classroom climate deteriorates. Teacher student interactions become intense; children show lower levels of on-task behavior and performance and motivation declines (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). As a result, teachers become emotionally exhausted and are more susceptible to developing high levels of occupational stress and burnout (Osher et al., 2007).

Bearing in mind the characteristics of the emotionally intelligent teacher and the benefits this teacher profile conveys for both students and teachers, we can safely conclude that EI should be an essential part in teacher education programs. Or should it not?

Are we certain beyond any reasonable doubt that EI is something good and worthwhile? How will people react when someone else determines, not just the right way to act, but also the right way to feel? In order to answer these questions we should probably look beyond its applications and practical advantages and discuss EI utilizing a different theoretical approach and perspective: "emotional labour".

Emotional Labour & Emotional Intelligence

Emotional labour is a state that requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind to others (Hochschild, 1983). Despite the fact that most of the research conducted

about emotional labour is not directly related to teachers, most of the findings can apply to the teaching profession as well⁷.

As Hochschild's (1979; 1983) research suggested, there are two main processes of emotional labour: *surface acting* and *deep acting*. In surface acting, people mask their true emotions in order to produce the "proper", contextually accepted behaviour. In this type of emotional labour, people pretend to feel something different. They may, for example, fake a smile even when they are in a bad mood. Surface acting may work in many social interactions and circumstances. However, it is not always as harmless as it appears to be. Pretending is an inauthentic process, and as such it requires a vast amount of internal tension generated by the effort to suppress true feelings. You can fake being happy and satisfied for a short time, even for a few hours. However, when pretence is prolonged, stress escalates, consequently job satisfaction and overall wellbeing deteriorates (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Pugliesi, 1999).

The emotional exhaustion aroused by the tension of dissonance is minimized when people perform deep acting (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Deep acting requires not just pretending to feel something but also to evoke in ourselves the state of mind and soul in order to feel the right feeling for the circumstance. It is the process of conscious modification of not just a person's observable behavior, but also an alteration of his/her internal feelings in an attempt to be more genuine with other people. "The social worker, then, might think of a surly client as the mother of a boy she knows down the street and in this way evoke the empathy she needs for the job" (Hochschild's, 1979, p.334).

Emotional workers, such as teachers, should not act; they should be so. From a good teacher is expected that he/she always put his/her students first. Thus, deep acting emotional labour is associated with a conscious effort to suppress his/her own feelings and put on a theatrical play in which he/she becomes identical with the character he/she is playing the part of. Thus, the person named John, Maria or any other name becomes the teacher. The better the identification that John or Maria has with the teacher persona the better professional he/she will be. The more he/she is able to put John and Maria on the side, the more effective he/she will be. Surface acting is obviously not enough. Deep acting is required not just for the students' sake; it is not just about being right for the job. It is something that helps emotional workers handle stress and "survive" in terms of maintaining their physical and mental health.

1 Hochschild (1983) focuses on flight attendants. However she proposed a list of "emotional labour jobs" that involve frequent customer contact and emotion displays controlled by the organization. Among her list you can find teachers as well.

Emotional labour is therefore a kind of labour that calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honour as deep and integral to our personality (Hochschild, 1983). John or Maria is no longer John or Maria. They are Mr John and Ms Maria the teachers. When they are in their classroom, any other aspect of their personal life needs to be left outside. However, this is not enough. Maria or John, the teacher persona, accompanies John and Maria outside the classroom. The person ceases to exist and becomes the teacher. Hochschild (1983, p.334) makes a cunning argument when discussing the issue of deep acting among flight attendants: "But she may come to realize that she is acting, and that the actor is both the 'real' her and not the 'real' her. And she may become confused and troubled over which is which".

Despite the fact that associations between EI and emotional labour have not been widely studied to date, it is apparent that the two notions have clear theoretical links. Reviewing the research findings examining the association between the two notions, Austin et al. (2008) hypothesized that high-EI individuals should be able to make use of their superior ability to regulate their emotions in the workplace to produce and experience situational-appropriate emotions. Thus, EI should be strongly associated with both surface and deep acting. However as Hargreaves points out the idea of emotional labour are not just different from EI, but in some ways, diametrically opposite. Managing one's moods represents the highest form of competence in terms of EI, whereas for Hochschild (1979, p.569) involves selling out the emotional self to the purposes of the organization: "When deep gestures of exchange enter the market sector and are bought and sold as an aspect of labour power, feelings are commoditized". In our opinion, examining Emotional Intelligence through Hochschild's perspective illuminates certain aspects of the notion that provide insights beyond the culture of niceness associated with the notion.

Emotional Intelligence abolishes the last frontier of emotional privacy that was embedded in the vagueness of individual definitions given to emotions. It creates a specific frame of reference within any subjective interpretation is diminished. Thus, Emotional Intelligence brings along a new technology that bears a frightening capability: to monitor, control and regulate persons' feelings. Not only does it allow scrutinizing the emotions of humans but also demands conformity to prescribed patterns of emotional expression that are transformed into rules of valuable, effective or satisfactory performance.

Teacher preparation programs should consider the fact that EI is not just a set of optimum capabilities. It is actually a construct that requires conformity and depersonalization. EI is not just the script of a theatrical play that is solely constraint in the classroom walls. It is a script of life. It is not just associated with surface act-

ing; it primarily reflects deep acting, which is nothing else than an invasion into a person's character and soul. As such, it is a blueprint, an architectural drawing for the construction of a new character. Moreover, when one considers the sophistication of the notion along with the advanced psychometric methods used for its measurement, it is not difficult to understand its' power to prescribe, monitor and control people's emotional behaviour. A person's character can be disputed, treated as deficit and then again reconstructed based on specific criteria and regulations. In this context, teachers may be depersonalised and deprived of any originality or personal mark upon the emotional practice of teaching. This process may result into sacrificing deep and integral parts of their-own being.

Some forms of emotional labour are certainly not bad. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) emotional labour is strongly related to task effectiveness and may become routine and effortless for the employee. At its best, emotional labour in teaching can be pleasurable and rewarding (Hargeaves, 2000). Teachers frequently report that they are trying to regulate many of their emotions because they believe it helps them achieve their goals (Sutton & Harper, 2009). Hargeaves (2000) points out that teachers largely enjoy the emotional labour of working with students because this meets their core classroom purposes in circumstances that they largely control. However, teachers dislike the emotional labour of working with parents who they regard as more peripheral to their work but with whom they are in a more ambivalent relationship of power. Thus, emotional labour becomes negative and draining when people feel they are masking or manufacturing their emotions to suit the purposes of others. These others are however, non-significant others. Research on perspective teachers' beliefs (e.g. Anderson 1995; Pajares, 1993) shows that usually when people decide to become teachers, personal envisions are focused on the interactions they will have with their students. They can see many children's faces but little does it come to mind a strict head teacher, a demanding superintendent or an angry parent. Hence, despite not being fully aware in advance, perspective teachers appear to be willing to subject their self into an emotional labour that would help their students. They are however not prepared for any other kind of emotional labour that comes with the demands of the profession. Bearing in mind the transformation of emotional labour into a rigid technology that comes with the utilization of the EI potentials, perspective teachers should at least be aware of the emotional burden, exhaustion and possible depersonalization they are about to face in their choice of career.

It all comes down to choices. Modern societies require for those wishing to become teachers to put children first. This is not just an ideology but an expressed policy, found in most contemporary curricula (e.g. Cypriot Curriculum; National

Curriculum UK; Greek Curricula), stressing the need for child centered approaches. No one can argue with this choice. Children should always come first. In this sense, the feelings of the teacher need to be regulated in a way that would be beneficial for the students. We definitely do not dispute this choice. We can however argue about the right of a person to choose based on an a priori awareness of what he/she is about to encounter.

Nelson et. al (2005) notes that emotional experience and expression are unique to each teacher and student. No one else thinks, expresses feelings, chooses behaviors, and acts in the same way. As they say emotional intelligence addresses this unique human condition. However, this type of generic characterizations (such as teacher and student) does not actually refer to specific persons. It mostly describes social agents performing specific social roles. As such, the teacher (according to the description of the role) should like all his/her students. He/she should like both Mike (the good, happy boy) and Emily (the indifferent, vindictive child). Despite the fact that the person behind the teacher persona does not actually like both children, he /she should work himself in a way that he/she will actually like both. Whichever the circumstances contributing to the development of the child's character may be, not all children are angels. Nevertheless, a teacher must love them all. And most importantly, not just show that he/she loves them all, but work him/herself in a condition to actually love them all. Hence, unconditioned and authentic love towards all children is a prerequisite in choosing this line of work. When unconditional love towards children is unauthentic, then the person, who has chosen to become a teacher, may engage into surface level acting. This process however, being associated a constant struggle to suppress true feelings, results into internal tension and most likely burnout.

In the process of choosing who is to sacrifice his/her personhood for the sake of other, definitely the choice is the teacher. If the teacher fails to do so, then he/she will become the "villain" (Ball & Goodson, 1985). Apparently, student related emotional labour is something beyond negotiations. Teachers should realize that in their choice of career they are expected to suppress and modify their own feelings for the sake of every individual child. However, they should know in advance that this is exactly what is expected of them.

Teachers as emotional workers- being informed ahead to make conscious choices and enhance stability

The emotional labour in the teaching profession has always been excessive (e.g. Lortie, 1975). Teachers were expected to suppress their true feelings and generate different ones even before the manifestation of EI. However, before the emergence of EI, things could still retain a considerable variance in terms of subjectivity and remain at a significant degree original and personal. What will happen now when the blue print is clear, feelings are standardized and accurately measured? The notion of stability in interactions has to do with a prior understanding of the context and the conceptual tools used to inform and develop educational policy. Are we fully aware about the definition of emotional intelligence? Do we all agree that EI is something good? Which sacrifices are we willing to make in order to become emotionally intelligent individuals?

This paper is not concerned with providing answers. Mostly, we intend to raise questions that need to be considered before introducing any novelties in educational policy. The process of including popular notions, such as EI, in any attempt to develop an educational agenda, needs to be considered not just in terms of practicality but also in terms of the sacrifices they demand. Societies and communities need to search what lies beneath beautiful catch phrases and read between the lines. Thus, a profound understanding is required in order to make safe choices that are consensually agreed among members and stakeholders of the society. Teachers should also be considered as stakeholders, because at the bottom line the technologies of EI have to do with the regulation of their own feelings and emotions. To make things simple, we may present the whole argument in the form of an equation:

$$PU+C= S$$

PU: Profound understanding (of what we should include in educational policy)

C: Consensus (between all stakeholders)

S: Stability in interactions.

This equation is not linear. It signifies an on going and dialectical process which is ignited whenever stability is compromised. Compromise can occur when any of the parts of the system is altered or differentiated. Stability calls for profound understanding and unbiased, free choice. Despite the fact that something may seem to be effective and worthwhile, it will only be stable as long as all the interested parties have accepted it, baring in mind its consequences. Stability will be the result of a collective construction of meaning- not of imposition.

We therefore need to consider that teachers are not just agents of a social role and a professional identity. They are people, persons and unique individuals who have chosen to become teachers. It is therefore essential that the decision to be a teacher must be an informed one. Since no one can argue that children should always come first, at least, potential teachers should know in advance the emotional labour, and depersonalization they are about to encounter and must be willing to provide to others the right to tamper with their inner emotional world. As extreme as this might sound, it will be the decision of a martyr (Neophytou & Koutselini, 2007). This burden can only be moderated when potential teachers choose this profession based on an authentic and unconditional love towards children. Given this, teachers will most likely be more able to endure any other emotional labour, pleasant or unpleasant, direct or peripheral to their work.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence, despite its popularity, has not been up to date employed into any large-scale programs in teacher training. However, attention and interest around the notion is constantly growing and is not utopian to consider that emotional intelligence would finally be included into teacher preparation programs or teacher evaluation schemes. In this case, it is important to be aware of the implications of the notion on the teacher and the sacrifices it demands in terms of his/her personhood. Caution is therefore necessary in future educational policy designs, especially when one considers the high levels of teacher burnout and attrition.

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