Emotional Intelligence and Effective Leadership: Implications for School Leaders*

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Abstract

Principals and other school administrators who lead from below the surface (Creighton, 2005) understand that authentic collaboration yields opposing ideas which, in turn, may produce heightened anxiety. Change theorists such as Fullan (2001) advocate that school leaders must be equipped to manage the inevitable intense emotions that arise from authentic collaboration and changes in practice. Specifically, emotional intelligence has been identified by researchers (Mills, 2009; Moore, 2009; Sala, 2003) to be one such tool that is positively associated with effective leadership.

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1 Introduction

Working in teams, rather than as individuals, is foundational to learning within modern organizations (Senge, 1990). Within the context of schools, teams may take many forms. For example: (a) leadership teams share decision making, (b) interdisciplinary teams create integrated learning experiences, and (c) collaborative teaching teams differentiate instruction for individual learners.

Collaborative professional learning and decision making offer a promising model for transformational change within schools, but it is a complex endeavor presenting multiple challenges. Collaborative inquiry and decision making require individual teachers to take risks as their successes and failures are shared publicly within the group. Differing interpretations of data and varying perspectives on appropriate courses of action naturally lead to conflict which, if not managed, can result in a diminished sense of efficacy or, worse, complete group paralysis (Emihovich & Battaglia, 2000).

Principals and other school administrators who lead from below the surface (Creighton, 2005) understand that authentic collaboration yields opposing ideas which, in turn, may produce heightened anxiety. Change theorists such as Fullan (2001) advocate that school leaders must be equipped to manage the inevitable intense emotions that arise from authentic collaboration and changes in practice. Specifically, emotional intelligence has been identified by researchers (Mills, 2009; Moore, 2009; Sala, 2003) to be one such tool that is positively associated with effective leadership.

2 Definitions of Key Terms

2.1 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been defined in the literature as the awareness of and ability to manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 2000). Salovey and Mayer described emotional intelligence as a motivational force and a means of effectively managing human interactions. Goleman (1995) added that emotional intelligence includes the ability to analyze and understand relationships, take someone else's perspective, resolve conflicts, and manage one's own anger.

2.2 Effective Leadership

Many books and articles have been written on the topic of *effective leadership*. A definition of effective leadership varies among experts. Questionnaires, such as the Leadership Practices Inventory created by Kouzes and Posner (1995), have been used to measure leadership effectiveness. Kouzes and Pousner believe that effective leaders engage in five practices; model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (1995). These practices and other leadership concepts provide a means of shaping a model leader. Understanding that effective leaders will also hold individual leadership traits, defining the term in a general sense is a challenge. For the purpose of our chapter, we will define effective leadership as "the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 30).

[1] http://ijelp.expressacademic.org

2.3 Collaboration

In practice, *collaboration* is sometimes mistaken for cooperation. Though the word "cooperation" is a common synonym found as a thesaurus entry, the idea of collaboration goes beyond mere cordial association to include the concept of teamwork and partnership; collaboration involves individuals whose work is interconnected in meaningful ways and collectively focused on common goals. Collaboration results in a change of behavior and a product that is superior to what individuals could have achieved on their own (Corrigan, 2000). Two pre-conditions for authentic collaboration among team members are: (1) members are intellectually and emotionally engaged in the process, and (2) members are willing to struggle with opposing ideas and work through conflict rather than avoid it.

2.4 Professional Leadership Communities

Collaboration is described in the literature as a key feature of *professional learning communities*, (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008; Levine & Marcus, 2007). Hord (1997) defines a professional learning community in a school as "the professional staff learning together to direct their effort toward improved student learning," (p. 3). Five common features of this type of structure are shared values, focus on student learning, collaboration, deprivatized practice, and reflective dialogue (Louis & Marks, 1998). In an era of accountability for increased student achievement, the tasks of a professional learning community within schools are clear: identify what students should know, determine how learning will be measured, and respond to students who do not demonstrate learning (Moore, 2009b).

3 Literature Review

Salovey and Mayer (1990) are among the key researchers of the past twenty years who have advanced emotional intelligence as a valid component of what intelligence is understood to be. In their construct, emotions are either positive or negative responses to events and motivate people to act in certain ways, including prioritizing their actions. A person exercises emotional intelligence when he assesses and expresses his own emotions, recognizes emotions in other people, and is motivated to adapt his behaviors accordingly.

Goleman (1995) drew from the work of Salovey & Mayer (1990) and other theorists to further describe what it means to be emotionally intelligent and he explained why emotional intelligence is an important dimension of human interactions. Goleman built part of his case on human physiology, describing the role of two parts of the brain: the *thalamus* and the *amygdala*. The amygdala serves as an emergency response mechanism through which signals are sent from the brain to other parts of the body before stimuli have been fully processed by the neocortex. These signals trigger emotional responses which can be determining factors in whether a person remains safe when confronted with physical danger (i.e. the fight or flight response) or whether he laughs or cries when told he has just been fired from his job. Goleman provided many examples of scenarios in which a person's emotional response to a situation can become more important that the person's cognitive ability. Fortunately for school leaders who want to gain these skills, Goleman concluded that the ability to assess and manage one's emotions in a given situation can be learned and improved.

Palmer (2003) further developed the conceptualization of emotional intelligence by applying a goodness of fit analysis to instruments that measure emotional intelligence. He found that no one instrument clearly emerged as a statistically good fit for conceptualizations of emotional intelligence. Palmer proposed a new taxonomy that included a dimension associated with leadership: *Interpersonal Management*, refering to the ability of someone to manage his own emotions and manage the emotions of others. The addition of the management dimension to previous conceptualizations of emotional intelligence further established the role that emotional intelligence plays in effective leadership.

Mills and Rouse (2009) stated, "That there is a moderately strong relationship between emotional intelligence an effective leadership" (p. 2). They conducted a meta-analysis to determine if a relationship exists between emotional intelligence and effective leadership. The results of the study suggested a moderately strong relationship between emotional intelligence effective leadership, $r = .383$, $p<.05$.

Mills and Rouse also suggested that emotional intelligence is a concept that school leaders should assess for themselves and that it should be incorporated in the evaluation process. School leaders who understand their own emotional intelligence are able to lead and interact with others more effectively. Also, the researchers suggested that emotional intelligence be used as an assessment tool for those entering educational leadership preparation programs.

Stone, Parker, and Wood (2005) reported on the Ontario Principal's Council leadership study that explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and school leadership. The study examined emotional and social competencies of school leaders and considered the information as a guide for planning professional development activities. Stone, et al., considered three ratings from principals and assistant principals, both elementary and secondary, and male and female. The ratings were self-reported using the *Emotional Quotient Inventory*. Stone, et al., concluded that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership, $p<.001$, as measured by these self assessments. When supervisors and staff assessed the skills of the principals and vice principals, however, Stone, et al., found that the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership was not significant, $p>.05$. In summary, the researchers found it important to evaluate leadership using multiple raters to consider different perspectives of an individual's leadership ability.

In Moore's book, *Inspire Motivate Collaborate: Leading with Emotional Intelligence* (2009a), the author researched the importance of emotional intelligence and the influence it exerts on leadership. Pointing out that while not all people recognize emotional intelligence as a viable leadership skill, Moore argued that emotional intelligence influences relationships with parents and all stakeholders.

Moore (2009a) also discussed the impact emotional intelligence has on decision-making for leaders. Reviewing the history of research previously conducted on emotional intelligence, Moore used the information to identify the areas of emotional intelligence that leaders should implement in their leadership. The importance of understanding not only one's own emotional intelligence but also the means by which a leader must manage and express those emotions were discussed at length in Moore's book.

By examining the emotional intelligence of staff members and determining effective ways to manage environments that are influenced by emotional intelligence, leaders can create cooperative learning situations that will benefit students (Moore, 2009a). According to Moore, emotional intelligence is not stagnant, but rather something that can be improved and learned. By posing case studies, suggesting thought-provoking questions, and offering suggestions on the ways leaders might improve their emotional intelligence, readers were guided towards these opportunities.

Designed to be a training book for building professional learning communities that are geared towards school improvement, Moore (2009a) presented the rationale for accepting emotional intelligence as a necessary skill for leaders, and he provides the techniques to recognize, to implement and to improve those emotional skills.

4 Implications for School Leaders

The positive association between effective leadership and emotional intelligence reported in the research has implications for school leaders in different stages of development. Pre-service school leaders should be assessed for emotional intelligence skills and their university preparation programs should include training to further develop their skills through problem-based learning. Practicing school leaders should use emotional intelligence skills to assess and manage their own emotional responses as well as the emotions of staff members as they engage in collaboration through professional learning communities. Finally, school districts should provide in-service professional development for practicing school leaders on how to use emotional intelligence to effectively lead collaborative efforts in schools.

As school leaders seek to transform schools, they should consider emotional intelligence to be among the factors that influence the success of these transformations (Moore, 2009a). Change does indeed provoke emotions and frequently not ones that are considered pleasant. Effective leaders understand that emotional intelligence can be developed (Goleman, 1995; Moore, 2009a). School leaders can implement these skills to create successful professional learning communities in which stakeholders share ownership and collaborate

to achieve.

5 Case Study and Activities

5.1 Case Study

While discussing a parental concern with a teacher over an assignment that had been made by a substitute during the teacher's absence, the principal questioned the teacher on her inconsistent attendance. After having admitted that she had failed to properly prepare for the assignments that she had left for her students while absent, the teacher's defense for the situation during her absence placed blame for the substitute. Implying that the substitute had not followed her directions, the principal interjected that the teacher's poor attendance had also been a factor in the problem, including the inconsistent quality of instruction and the resultant opportunity for miscommunication. When the principal noted that she had been absent one fourth of the time over the last six weeks, the teacher immediately broke in to tears and offered to resign.

After resigning, the teacher citied one reason for the decision as that of betrayal on the principal's behalf. She stated that he principal had approved personal leave for her to travel and visit with her son and that this approved leave accounted for the majority of the time she had been absent.

Approaching the discussion from a perspective of positional leadership rather than one of emotional leadership, the principal failed to recognize the emotions from both sides of the desk as they existed at the time. The combination of the principal's anger over the teacher's failure to provide a quality program for her students, and the teacher's feelings of failure and vulnerability contributed to the breakdown in this situation. It is obvious that this confrontation represented only a minute piece of the relationship that existed between the principal and the teacher. While the teacher's attendance was a contributing factor to the parental concern, the administrator does have ownership in the attendance pattern of the teacher, given the fact that approval had been secured prior to the absence. The discussion should have centered on ways to assist the teacher in performing her job in a more professional manner and not on the administrator's anger with the teacher.

5.2 Activity 1

As a school leader, commit to learning more about your own emotional intelligence and its role in defining you as an effective leader. Complete a self assessment instrument and ask selected staff members to provide you with feedback as well. An easily accessible instrument is Palmer's GENOS Emotional Intelligence Inventory (Concise) available in Moore (2009a). After collecting the feedback, reflect on its implications for you as a school leader.

5.3 Activity 2

Choose a collaborative team within your school and conduct an observation of one of its regular meetings. Use scripting to record specific exchanges among team members that involve emotional responses. Note elements of the decision-making process that were influenced by emotions. In a follow-up meeting with the team, share your observations in a constructive manner that helps the team members better understand their own facility with emotional intelligence.

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