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The Level of Emotional Intelligence in Principals of Recognized and Acceptable Schools

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What We Know About Emotional Intelligence

The future of our democratic society depends on a strong and vibrant educational system. The 90s brought us accountability and high stakes testing and our new millennium promises to demand even more sacrifices from teachers, students, and principals as expectations rise and pressures increase for educational improvements. Quality leadership from school principals will be crucial in creating schools capable of producing students who can excel and compete in today's challenging global economy.

Doubtlessly, principals are the key component of any systematic school reform effort. Newman, King, and Young (2000) state that school capacity is a critical factor that affects instruction and student achievement. Principal leadership is one of the most important components of a school’s capacity, particularly the brand of principal leadership that is centered on the development of teachers’ knowledge and skills, the maturation of the school as a professional community, the structuring of a coherent school program, and the acquisition of essential technical resources (Fullan 2000).

Bennis (1989) described the modern leader as a social architect capable of generating intellectual capital in the organizations they lead. Schlechty (1990) added that leaders are in a position to influence others and must have the social skills to take advantage of that position. Fullan elaborated on the characteristics of educational leaders capable of leading sustained educational changes. He observed that “effective leaders combine a strong sense of moral purpose, an understanding of the dynamics of change, and great emotional intelligence as they build relationships” (Fullan 2003 p. 93).

Previously, Fullan (2001a) had identified five traits that principals must develop in this culture of change. These traits were: (a) a strong sense of moral purpose, (b) an understanding of the dynamics of change, (c) a commitment to developing and sharing new knowledge, (d) a capacity for coherence making and (e) emotional intelligence as they build and foster relationships. The latter of these traits has received little treatment in the research literature where educational leadership is concerned and is therefore the primary focus of this discussion.

Fullan (2002) emphasized that “emotionally intelligent leaders are aware of their own emotional makeup, are sensitive and inspiring to others, and are able to deal with day-to-day problems as they work on more fundamental changes in the culture of the organization” (p. 3). Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002, p. 21) posited that leaders use emotional intelligence (EI) to develop relationships that are in-sync with their organization by forming “emotional bonds that help them stay focused even amid profound change and uncertainty.” Essentially, the principals of the future will need to be attuned to the big picture, and be able to think conceptually as they transform the organization through people and teams. They will also need to possess strong interpersonal skills, be able to get along with others, and exercise high levels of intelligence and energy.

The idea of EI has struck a particular chord with many leaders today because it affirms what many have
assumed for so long that general intelligence, as measured by our IQ, is not the only critical factor in predicting the success of leaders in real everyday organizations. As Goleman (1997) stated, “IQ today gets you hired, but EI gets you promoted.” Goleman (1998a) suggested that as much as 80%-90% of the competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from average leaders are related to EI. If this is accurate, developers of leaders should look for ways to increase the acquisition and growth of these soft skills.

To be sure, today there is still considerable controversy over the construct of EI as a measurable ability and how it relates to effective leadership. In recognition of this, Palmer (2001) stated that “despite the recent popularity of the construct, exactly how and to what extent EI accounts for effective leadership is unknown. There is little research published that has explicitly examined this relationship” (p. 5). Given the discordant views of EI and its possible effect on leadership for capacity building, the singular intention of this research is to establish the extent to which EI does account for effective leadership.

Our definition of emotional intelligence is borrowed from Salovey and Mayer (1990) who considered EI as the ability to monitor one’s own and others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action. They conducted a systematic study of EI to further develop the concept of EI and identify the specific skills associated with it. They later posited an ability model of EI called the Four-Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). In their deliberations, they postulated that EI consists of three mental processes: appraising and expressing emotions in the self and other, regulating emotions in the self and others, and using emotions in adaptive ways. They divided EI into four branches of mental abilities: perceiving and identifying emotions, using emotion to facilitate the thought processes, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. “The order of the branches, from perception to management, represents the degree to which the ability is integrated within the rest of an individual’s major psychological subsystems—that is, within his or her overall personality” (Mayer, 1998).

According to Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004), branch one reflects the perception of emotion and involves the ability to recognize emotion in the faces and expressions of others. This ability includes non-verbal perception and expression of emotion in the face other areas related to communication. Branch two, facilitation, explains the capacity of using emotions to assist thinking. Knowledge of the link between emotions and thinking can be used to direct one’s planning (Izard, 2001). Branch three, the understanding of emotions, involves the capacity to analyze emotions, appreciate their trends over time and understand their outcomes (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso 2004). Branch four includes the ability to manage emotions. This ability involves the entire personality. Emotions of individuals “are managed in the context of the individual’s goals, self knowledge, and social awareness” (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso 2004, p.199). An application of this is that we teach our children to control anger or sorrow.

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness

We know that federal legislation places demands on educators to produce better academically prepared students each year, even though they are given fewer resources. Likewise at the state level, local educational agencies are holding already overburdened educators “accountable” for the lack of measurable student achievement, thus creating tension and apprehension among school leaders. As a support to this notion, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) described the current situation faced by leadership in public schools today in their position paper Principal Shortage (2000). “Principals are dealing with increased job related stress, heightened accountability,
It is clear that if Texas schools are to rise to the current challenges set before them, they will require outstanding leaders with exceptional leadership skills, including interpersonal skills that have become integral to effective leadership (Goleman 1998b). Where leaders were once seen to control, plan, and inspect the overall running of an organization, in today's successful organizations leaders must motivate and inspire others, foster positive attitudes, and create a sense of contribution and importance with and among employees (Hogan, Curphy and Hogan 1994). In essence, these school leaders will need to hone their leadership skills in order to provide the type of transformational leadership that the new millennium will require of successful educational institutions.

What is not yet a certainty is whether EI is related to educational leadership effectiveness. Our intention, then, was to determine the degree to which EI is related to principal effectiveness as measured by the school's academic success. Such information is warranted in that it will help inform programs that prepare educational leaders whether they should focus on the development of EI among their participants.

Developing and equipping administrators with the skills necessary to successfully lead democratic school reforms may require that universities and school districts consider every developable skill set needed by today's principals. Many of the standards related to administrator development and certification, such as those of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, are grounded in conventional organizational theory, which is tied closely to the work of Frederick Taylor (English 2003). Universities and districts following conventional preparation and development programs typically address technical skills and knowledge, but overlook the cultivation of relational skills needed by today's educational leaders.

Research Questions about Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness

In an attempt to measure the extent to which EI impacts leadership effectiveness we generated two research questions. The first was to determine if there was a relationship between the EI level of a school's principal and the academic success of that school. The second question asked about differences in EI that exist among the four branches of EI, including perceiving, facilitating, understanding, and managing. In both instances we compared principals of schools rated academically “recognized” and principals of similar schools rated academically “acceptable.” The study examined the relationship between EI skills as measured by the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MCSEIT) and a principal's ability to successfully lead a school, as measured by the school's academic rating.

Method

Our study is grounded in the accepted premise that successful schools need educational leaders who have the abilities to facilitate sustained and lasting change. As Fullan (2003) reiterated, “these new educational leaders will need to have a strong sense of moral purpose for direction and great emotional intelligence as they build relationships” (p. 93). In effect, principals will not only need strong intellectual skills to be a great influence on the school culture, but they must be able to influence and
understand relationships and the feelings and emotions of those they serve and lead. Our basis purpose, then, was to investigate the impact of EI on school leadership quality.

We measured the levels of EI in two sets of educational leaders. One set of principals lead schools defined by the Texas Education Agency as recognized for student performance on TAKS. The second set was principals from matched (similar demographics) campuses that are defined as acceptable by TEA. To compare their levels of EI we utilized a causal-comparative research design. Specifically, we selected the comparison groups as described below.

Whereas all practicing secondary school principals from the State of Texas were the target population for the study, we ultimately selected two different groups of thirty-five principals. The first sample was randomly selected from all principals of “recognized” secondary schools in Texas during the 2004-2005 school year. Only principals who had been in the same recognized schools for at least two years were included. The comparison group of principals was selected randomly from a comparison school group list of each recognized campus but limited to schools rated “acceptable.” Every campus in the State of Texas has a list of forty comparison schools prepared each year by the Texas Education Agency. Schools rated acceptable in this list were randomly selected until one principal on the list agreed to participate in the study. Only schools with principals who have served two or more years were included in the list as well.

Comparison schools were selected from the Texas Education Agency list because of similar demographic related to ethnicity of the student sub-group populations, the socio-economic status of the campus, the percent of limited English proficient students, and the percentage of mobile students. Thus comparison school should have a student grouping that is very similar to the recognized campus.

Once the principals were selected they were given the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) to complete online. The MSCEIT measures levels of EI related to ability along four separate branches of EI: (a) perceiving emotions accurately, (b) using emotion to facilitate thought, (c) understanding emotion, and (d) managing emotion (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). We contacted each principal by snail mail, then e-mail, and finally a follow-up phone call, each including an invitation to complete the MSCEIT.

The MSCEIT is a 141-item performance scale that assesses how people are able to accomplish tasks that are related to emotional sensitivity. Questions on the instrument are related to a respondent’s actual ability to solve emotional problems. The MSCEIT provides 15 main scores, a total EI score, two area scores, four branch scores, and eight task scores. The MSCEIT was administered on-line to the selected principals. The time for completing this instrument ranges between 30 and 45 minutes.

We were confident in using the MSCEIT in that it’s overall reliability is $r = .91$ or .93 according to which scoring, expert or general consensus is applied. The reliability of branch scores is $r = .79$ to .91 using consensus scoring and $r = .77$ to .90 using expert scoring. The test-retest reliability is $r = .86$ (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso 2004). We adhered to Salvia and Ysseldyke’s (1995) standard that a reliability of .60 for group data is the acceptability standard for the social sciences.

The test suppliers, the Multi-Health Organizational Effectiveness Group, scored the response and provided the scores to us in an Excel spreadsheet. The researchers compared the results of the two groups of principals for all four branch scores of the MSCEIT and the cumulative EI score, using
independent sample t-tests. The significance level was set at the traditional $p > .05$. Essentially, we tested whether principals of recognized schools differed from principals of acceptable schools on whether they (a) perceive emotions accurately, (b) use emotion to facilitate thought, (c) understand emotions, (d) manage emotions, and (e) combine all four branches of EI.

Results and Discussion

Our first operation was to identify a representative group of principals of recognized campuses and their comparisons. We discovered that there were 359 TEA recognized secondary schools for the 2005 accountability year. Using a set of random numbers generated by a spreadsheet software, we systematically proceeded through the randomly ranked list of 359 until 35 principals consented and completed the MSCEIT. A second group of 35 principals of acceptable schools were subsequently randomly selected from a pre-selected comparison pool of 40 schools that are demographically similar to each recognized school. This pre-selected comparison pool is produced for every campus by the Texas Education Agency and is a part of the AEIS report for every campus. Only acceptable schools were randomly selected from this comparison pool. Essentially we managed to solicit the participation of 70 principals who agreed to complete the MSCEIT.

As Table 1 below shows, both groups of principals were identical in gender distribution, and both groups enjoyed a preponderance of principals between the ages of 40 and 49. Next we performed an independent samples t-test to ascertain whether overall MSCEIT scores differed significantly between principals of recognized campuses and principals of acceptable campuses. Table 2 lists the means of principals of acceptable campuses ($n=35$, $M=35.36$, $SD=23.39$) and principals of recognized campuses ($n=35$, $M=41.13$, $SD=25.31$). Results of the t-test, as shown on Table 3 indicates a $t$ of -.991 that was not statistically significant ($p =.325$). This alerted us to the fact that the two groups of principals did not have statistically significantly different overall MSCEIT scores.

Finally we addressed our second research question by comparing the branch scores for the two groups of principals using independent sample t-tests. Table 4 shows the results of this analysis. As was the case with the overall MSCEIT scores, we did not detect any statistically significant differences in branch scores between the two groups of principals.

Although there is some conceptual defense for hypothesizing that EI levels of principals ought to affect their schools’ capacity and ultimately the schools’ academic performance, no such
difference was detected here. We speculate that any true difference may have been masked by the tremendous variation in EI scores within each of the two groups of principals. In effect, the EI scores, both overall and branch, varied wildly within each group. Second, we prognosticated that principals who lead schools for two or more years would maximize transformation within their schools which would lead to improved student performance. It may be necessary to first look at the impact of EI on characteristics of school transformation, such as teacher morale and school climate, before looking at the impact of EI directly on student performance indicators. We did look at school performance as an indicator of school success since that is the barometer that districts use in the state of Texas.

In reflecting on the status of schools in Texas, we believe that this is the first salvo in our investigation of this nascent line of inquiry. Some fertile areas of future investigation that we recommend include:

a. looking at more proximal measures of principal influence such as school capacity building in the form of teacher attrition, the metamorphosis of the school as a professional community, and the focus on improving teacher knowledge and skills

b. comparing principals over longer periods of time

c. conducting within-group comparisons such as with elementary principals, high school principals and middle school principals

d. using a much larger sample to include low performing schools

e. looking closely at gender comparisons, again with a much larger sample

f. conducting an experimental or quasi-experimental study in which principals are taught about EI and then track their impact on both proximal and distal measures.

Our first foray into this area of inquiry was helpful in that it alerted us to areas that we should avoid. Doubtlessly one study cannot influence policy or practice when it comes to EI. Our intent is to continue to look at this area more fastidiously. If EI in fact affects school capacity building and school performance, we should understand how this happens and perhaps alert leadership training programs about this as they engage in preparing school leaders.

### Table 3. Independent Samples t-test for Principals’ Total MSCEIT Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means Compared</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total MSCEIT Score</td>
<td>-0.991</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>.325</td>
<td>5.77</td>
</tr>
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* p ≤ .05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. MSCEIT Branch Score Comparisons</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Branch</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI Branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceiving Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating Thought</td>
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<td>Understanding Emotion</td>
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<td>Managing Emotion</td>
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leaders of tomorrow. We frequently borrow ideas from the business world and modify them to fit our social institutions. If this is one key ingredient that we should consider as a key to effective leadership, then we should learn about it as much as possible and train our prospective leaders accordingly.

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