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The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence of Principals and Student Performance in Mississippi Public Schools

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Introduction and Background

Just as the quality of teachers affects students' academic success, the quality of school leadership is significantly related to student achievement, (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). The job of the school administrator is challenging in any set of circumstances, but the leadership in low and marginally performing schools presents additional and unique challenges. In fact, some districts are faced with the socio-economic circumstances often correlated with poor performance (Heck, 1992). Breaking the cycle of poverty for these students is much more likely to occur if the type of quality educational programming afforded to prospective school administrators is dramatically and innovatively enhanced.

The enactment of *No Child Left Behind* (2003), the landmark reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, heralded significant changes in expectations for school leaders and introduced a revolutionary concept-universal proficiency for students. The *Common School Movement* (Spring, 1990) occurred early in the nation's history, but it took an entire century of movements for America to take even tentative steps toward full inclusion of all learners through the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). "The decades since have witnessed the affirmation of the educational rights of children with special needs, children in poverty, children who are new English language learners, and others. We have entered the new millennium having nearly fulfilled the goal of universal access-and it took us a century and a half to do it!" (Ward, 2003a, p.E1). *No Child Left Behind* extended the nation's expectation beyond *access* to universal *proficiency* and provided a timetable of a mere twelve years-that is "picking up the pace" considerably! School leaders should be prepared to accelerate learning and proficiency as never before; this is important for all learners, but particularly important and challenging-for the most vulnerable learners. The *2001 Effective Schools Movement* pioneer, Larry Lezotte, in an interview conducted by Ward (2003b), stated it this way: "I never believed that in my lifetime we would have a federal law grounded in the belief that all children can learn!" (p.13).

Currently, many schools are suffering from both a lack of qualified administrators and the inability to keep qualified administrators once hired, especially at the building level. Currently over 50% of the administrators serving in our nation are eligible for retirement (Gibbs, 2008). As a result of accountability programming, there has never been a more critical time for our schools to have competent leadership. Furthermore, as a result of the prominent role ascribed to administrators in the reform reports, educational administration programs were challenged to ensure that building-level administrators would be able to work in restructuring settings, learning new roles, and serving as catalysts for change (Elmore 2003; Murphy, 1990; Firestone 2000). Building-level administrators are now seen as key change agents in school reform. They must be steeped in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to supervise a continuous improvement process that measures progress in raising student performance. They must build learning communities within their schools and engage the broader school community in creating and achieving a compelling vision for their schools (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995).

Furthermore, the literature has been quite emphatic in finding that successful schools are associated with excellent leaders. Most recently in Marzano, Waters and McNultys' (2005) work, *School Leadership that Works*, a meta-analysis of over 70 studies (from a total of over 5,000), demonstrated that there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership behaviors and student achievement. The findings suggest that 21 leadership behaviors, if employed in the school setting, will dramatically impact student achievement. These behaviors include a clear focus, good communication skills, affirmation of the faculty, investment in relationships, promotion of change, strength of character and flexibility. Many of the aforementioned attributes relate to subscales measured by the Bar-On EQ-i:125 (Bar-On, 2004) a test that measures for Emotional Intelligence. Dr. Reuven Bar-On, one of the most respected scholars in the field of emotional intelligence, has developed what has become one of the most widely used instruments for assessing emotional intelligence.

In 1983, Howard Gardner espoused his theory of multiple intelligences. In particular, two forms of intelligence, interpersonal and intrapersonal, serve as a springboard for the foundation of emotional intelligence as we know it today. Highly popularized by Daniel Goleman in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, Goleman discusses the concepts of human intelligence in an emotional capacity. Emotional intelligence "is a type of social intelligence that involves the ability of one to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions (Meyer and Salovey, 1993).

Do mood and/or emotion impact the leadership role? Can we truly have compelling and visionary leaders without the benefit of passion and enthusiasm? What drives the most dynamic and charismatic leaders to the top? Daniel Goleman (2004) respected researcher and psychologist, in his premier piece in the *Harvard Business Review* put it this way, " ..…e most effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: They all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence."

The idea of emotional intelligence concerns the many ways that we perceive ourselves and others and thus, our behaviors and actions are influenced by these perceptions. Therefore, regardless of how intellectually gifted we might be, sometimes our emotions overtake our intellect. Our emotions impact our behaviors in a myriad of ways. How in-control or more importantly in-tune we are with our emotions plays a significant role in the way we present ourselves to others. This presentation could very well impact the degree to which we are successful in the moment and in life.

If school leaders do impact student achievement and a relationship between subscale scores of principals at either high or low-performing schools exists, and if the subscales of emotional intelligence as defined by Bar-On can be taught, then perhaps these emotional intelligence traits should be a part of educational leadership preparation programs.   As Schlecty (1990) so aptly put it, leaders are in positions to influence others and must have the social skills to do so.

Methodology

A letter of introduction and instructions for completing an online demographic questionnaire and the BarOn EQi online survey were sent to all principals in Mississippi explaining the significance and purpose of the study. The letter of instructions provided a unique code for completing both online instruments in order to assure anonymity. To increase the likelihood of principal participation, the support of the state superintendent of education was gained and an email was sent from him to all

principals statewide endorsing the study. At the time of the survey there were 937 Mississippi public school principals (grades Pre-k-12). These principals constituted the population (N=937) for this study. Within this population there were 460 elementary school principals, 179 middle/junior high school principals, 211 senior high school principals, and 87 principals of schools grouped as "other schools" due to the specialized nature of the institutions (e.g. attendance centers, alternative schools and specialty schools such as the Mississippi School for Math and Science). A total of 261 principals responded to the survey. Those responding represented principals from 157 elementary schools, 43 junior high schools, 41 senior high schools, and 20 from "other schools"; a response rate of 28%.

For accreditation purposes schools in Mississippi are categorized into five levels by the state according to school performance on state wide tests. Those tests address the areas of reading, language arts and mathematics. While the state has since revised the number of categories, at the time of the study five levels were utilized: *Low Performing or Level 1*; *Under Performing or Level 2*; *Successful or Level 3*; *Exemplary or Level 4*; and *Superior or Level 5*. Of the 261 principals responding 2 were from *Low Performing* schools (n=2); 23 were from *Under Performing* schools (n=23); 86 were from *Successful* schools (n=86); 67 were from *Exemplary* schools (n=67); and 64 were from *Superior* schools (n=64).

The instrument used for this survey was the 125-item EQ-i (Bar-On, 2004a) which is a self-report of emotional and social intelligence behavior. This instrument is the most widely used measure of emotional-social intelligence to date. The Bar-On EQ-i:125 has a 5-point response scale ranging from *very seldom or not true of me* (1) to *very often true of me or true of me* (5). The Bar-On EQ-i:125 takes approximately 40 minutes to complete. Scores are given on the following five composite scales that comprise 15 subscale scores: Intrapersonal (comprising Self-Regard, Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Independence, and Self-Actualization); Interpersonal (comprising Empathy, Social Responsibility, and Interpersonal Relationship); Stress Management (comprising Stress Tolerance and Impulse Control); Adaptability (comprising Reality-Testing, Flexibility, and Problem-Solving); and General Mood (comprising Optimism and Happiness). The survey also generates a total EQ score. Scores are computer-generated with raw scores being converted into standard scores based on a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. This instrument has been rigorously tested for validity and reliability and has been normed for age and gender (Bar-On, 2004b).

Findings

Restated, the research question asks, does a relationship exist between total EQI or EQI subscale scores of principals at either low-performing or high performing schools? Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the School Performance Level to Total Emotional Intelligence score (EQI score) and each EQI subscale score. No significant differences were found. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1		
	F	Sig.
TOTAL_EQI	.652	.660

INTRAPERSONAL		.855	.512
SELF_REGARD		.997	.420
EMOTIONAL_SELF_AWARENESS		.768	.573
ASSERTIVENESS		1.150	.335
INDEPENDENCE		.889	.489
SELF_ACTUALIZATION		.482	.789
INTERPERSONAL		.732	.600
EMPATHY		.250	.940
SOCIAL_RESPONSIBILITY		.831	.529
INTERPERSONAL_RELATIONSHIP		.777	.567
STRESS_MANAGEMENT		.789	.558
STRESS_TOLERANCE		1.258	.283
IMPULSE_CONTROL		1.473	.199
ADAPTABILITY		1.042	.393
REALITY_TESTING		.796	.553
FLEXIBILITY		.962	.441
PROBLEM_SOLVING		1.163	.328
GENERAL_MOOD		.641	.669

		.660	.654
OPTIMISM		.660	.654
HAPPINESS		1.212	.304

Similar findings occur when the scores are subjected to correlational analysis (Pearson significance set at .05). No significant correlations were shown between school performance level and total EQI or EQI subscales. However, it is interesting to note that the correlation between school level and total EQI approaches 0.0 (0.008) and that eight of the EQI subscales (self regard, self actualization, interpersonal, social responsibility, interpersonal relationship, adaptability, flexibility and problem solving) show a negative correlation to school performance level. The results of the correlational analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2			
	r	n	Sig (2-tailed)
TOTAL_EQ	+0.008	261	0.897
INTRAPERSONAL	+0.023	261	0.708
SELF_REGARD	-0.014	261	0.823
EMOTIONAL_SELF_AWARENESS	+0.004	261	0.946
ASSERTIVENESS	+0.106	261	0.086
INDEPENDENCE	+0.029	261	0.638
SELF_ACTUALIZATION	-0.016	261	0.803
INTERPERSONAL	-0.037	261	0.554
EMPATHY	+0.003	261	0.996
SOCIAL_RESPONSIBILITY	-0.059	261	0.341
INTERPERSONAL_RELATIONSHIP	-0.018	261	0.775

STRESS_MANAGEMENT	+0.040	261	0.525
STRESS_TOLERANCE	+0.021	261	0.739
IMPULSE_CONTROL	+0.042	261	0.498
ADAPTABILITY	-0.038	261	0.538
REALITY_TESTING	+0.034	261	0.584
FLEXIBILITY	-0.098	261	0.114
PROBLEM_SOLVING	-0.027	261	0.658
GENERAL_MOOD	+0.069	261	0.270
OPTIMISM	+0.095	261	0.126
HAPPINESS	+0.049	261	0.433

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings indicate with clarity that in this study emotional intelligence was not shown to be related to student achievement as designated by school performance level. ANOVA indicated no statistically significant difference in Total EQI or EQI subscales and school performance level. And, correlational analysis shows no statistically significant relationship between total EQI or EQI subscales and school performance level.

Given the importance of emotional intelligence reported in the literature it would seem that, while important, emotional intelligence is not directly related to student performance. What then is the role of emotional intelligence in successful leadership which has been shown to be related to student performance? One view might be that emotional intelligence is a part of that large gestalt of personality characteristics that make a leader a leader. That is, emotional intelligence is a contributing or intervening variable that when examined in combination with other positive leadership characteristics enhances the overall effect. Another possible view is that emotional intelligence is related to and/or is a characteristic that contributes to success as a leader through the perception of peers, subordinates and/or the constituents of the school community as a whole. As stated by Stephens and Douglas (2009), these leaders characteristics may be more clearly reflected in measurement of school culture and teacher morale and have an indirect impact on student achievement, than directly tied as indicated through these two studies.

Simply put, leadership is at least a two-fold concept combining personal abilities and perceptions and

is related to the perception of others. Thus, if a leader is viewed as possessing a high level of emotional intelligence he/she may be viewed in a more positive light by those with whom the leader works and they may be more likely to follow. From an organizational perspective, perhaps emotional intelligence is one of the many characteristics of the symbolic frame posited by Bolman and Deal (2003) in their landmark work 'Reframing Organizations." From this point of view, the leader might be seen as capable of recognizing and acting appropriately upon the emotional underpinnings of the employees in an organization and/or those associated with an organization in a positive way, thus enhancing both the organization and his/her own personal leadership capital. Further research is necessary to clarify the role of emotional intelligence in leadership.

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