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## **Emotional intelligence testing for headteachers: globalization or lost in translation**

### **Purpose**

The emotional labor of headteachers and teachers is complex. This paper explores the relevance of the use of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence test (MSCEIT) (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2000) when assessing the emotional intelligence of headteachers as part of an investigation which aimed to reveal the ways in which female secondary school leaders were emotionally intelligent and whether it was possible to test for emotional intelligence.

### **Methodology**

Seven female headteachers' MSCEIT reports are investigated. Semi-structured interviews were held pre- and post-test to explore the headteachers' emotional labor. In addition, teachers serving under the headteachers were interviewed.

### **Findings**

The accuracy of the MSCEIT is questioned, rather than taking the results at face value, attention is given to its content, language and cultural differences. The MSCEIT originates from the USA and is used globally. The findings of this investigation suggest it is possible the MSCEIT represents a deficit model due to the test takers' interpretation of nuanced language. The findings show a disparity in relation to MSCEIT scores and self-reported emotional responses.

### **Conclusions**

Although the sample size is small and therefore cannot claim generalization from the findings, the use of emotional intelligence tests should be used with caution. Emotional responses are best understood through life experience as the headteachers attach retrospective meaning to their leadership actions.

### **Value**

Headteachers' work is multifaceted because emotion is integral to the processes of teaching and learning. The emotional labor of headteachers and teachers impacts and has relevance to their roles as educational landscapes continue to shift.

**Keywords** Professional Capital, Leadership, Headteacher, Emotional intelligence, Emotions, MSCEIT

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate headteachers' emotional responses and specifically to explore the use of the MSCEIT (through analysis of scores supported by data from individual semi-structured interviews) to the extent it assesses their emotional intelligence. A teacher's role is multidimensional, everyday experiences bring challenge. Being accountable for the work of teachers and pupil achievement is demanding. Emotional labor, the carefully considered displays of emotion (Hochschild, 1983; Gronn, 2003) enacted and experienced by a school leader has parallels with the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence emerged when Salovey and Mayer (1990) drew upon previous research covering aspects of intelligence. They described it as "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189).

At the time of proposing the research incorporated in this paper, much had previously been written connecting emotional intelligence to business (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997), but considerably less in relation to teaching or school leadership. However, emerging research in recent years on emotions in education has utilized qualitative and quantitative tools, to investigate the patterns of emotional experiences and communication in educational organizations focusing on their impact to their work at a personal level and to the professional community (Arar, 2017; Oplatka, 2017; Cliffe, 2016, 2011; Zembylas, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). Less attention has been paid to attempts to reveal the extent to which headteachers and teachers are emotionally intelligent. The art of leading, over the course of time impacts on an individual's life history (and vice versa) and on their intelligent use of emotions (Arar, 2017; Cliffe, 2011, 2016). Emotions, emotional labor and emotional intelligence in relation to teachers' and headteachers' work resonates with the theory of professional capital, working on the ideology that education communities need personal and proficient investment for all to benefit (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013) and thus warrants investigation. Therefore to address this gap in knowledge, the purpose of this paper is to explore headteachers' emotional intelligence and in doing so, to specifically assess the use and relevance of the MSCEIT with the aim to enhance our understanding of the instrument in relation to headteachers' emotional intelligence. This paper is structured to give a review of the relevant literature in the field and in particular details the MSCIET, provides the methodology, reveals the findings which generate the discussion and is concluded by synthesizing the key points with considerations for both future research and practice.

## **Review of Literature**

Professional capital and long-term goals of “economic efficiency and social cohesion” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p. 37), is achieved through professional investment in the work of teachers and headteachers. In addition, emotional investment in teaching and leading experienced at a personal level invariably has potential to impact on the organization (Arar, 2017; Oplatka, 2017). Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, attention is given to reviewing literature focused on emotional intelligence and testing for emotional intelligence.

## **Emotional intelligence**

Building on the work of Thorndike (1920), Sternberg (1985), Bar-On (1985), and Salovey and Mayer (1990), Goleman (1995) popularized the concept of emotional intelligence with the key message being if you are able to manage your emotions, then you are more likely to be successful in life. Developing his concept, coupled with the theories of Mayer and Salovey (1997), Goleman (1998) defined emotional intelligence through “self-awareness ... self-regulation ... motivation ... empathy ... and social skills” (p. 318). Taylor and Bagby (2000) identified emotional responses and incorporated the need to think about feelings. With feelings and emotions inextricably linked (Cliffe, 2016), an understanding of emotions is required to make sense of emotional intelligence (Russell & Barchard, 2002). A distinct definition is illusive with blurred boundaries as to what constitutes emotions, although most recognize the majority of “emotions are *directed at* or *are* about something” (Russell & Barchard, 2002, p. 365, emphasis in the original).

Emotional intelligence has its critics (Higgs & Dulewicz, 1999) but the concept appears to be accessible, everyone can be aware of and take the necessary steps to improve their own emotional competence. Emotional intelligence skills can be used deliberately in order to enhance performance at work (Merlevede, Bridoux & Vandamme, 2001; Cliffe, 2011) where individuals are encouraged to understand the power of their emotions and of others’ emotions and how to manage them. Successful people in a variety of careers not least teachers, develop emotional intelligence skills they have learnt intuitively and use subconsciously (Cliffe, 2016). Predominantly, since the 1990s, the emergent definitions and explanations appear to encompass long lists of personal attributes which have been incorporated into emotional intelligence tests.

## **Testing for emotional intelligence**

Numerous methods exist to measure or test for emotional intelligence. Goleman (1998) referred to McClelland's (1973) "Testing for Competence Rather than Intelligence" where IQ testing and traditional academic awards were considered to be restrictive when predicting how well someone would perform in a job. This was perhaps one of the first attempts to measure non-IQ intelligence with a focus on personal competences. Instruments include self-report measurement tools, for example Cooper and Sawaf's (1997) "EQ Map" to ability-based tests such as Bar-On's (2000) "Emotional Quotient Inventory".

The range of available tests and their different components bring implications for comparisons to be drawn. For the purposes of this paper, particular reference is made to one instrument which claims to combine emotions and thinking, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Mayer et al., 2000). Mayer (2001) refers to traditional methods of measuring intelligence, where there are correct responses and infers the ability test is a method of assessment for emotional intelligence "in which a person has to solve problems and there are 'right' answers" (p. 20). In addition, the test reveals indicators about relationships (Cobb & Mayer, 2000). The MSCEIT seeks to provide an overall emotional intelligence score but also provides branch scores (Mayer et al., 2000) as follows:

### *Branch 1: Perception of Emotion*

Three subtests measure the perception of emotion in faces, landscapes and abstract designs. The subject will judge the amount of emotion they see in the pictures using a five point scale. For example, evaluating how much sadness, anger or fear can be seen in a face.

### *Branch 2: Emotional Facilitation*

There are several subscales used to see if "people use emotion to facilitate cognitive activities" (p. 331). A "synesthesia" subscale is used to determine whether "emotions are not only sensed and perceived, but also processed in some meaningful, initial way" (p. 331).

### *Branch 3: Understanding Emotion*

A person will respond to multiple choice questions to "blend" (p. 331), matching sets of emotions to a single emotion.

#### *Branch 4: Managing Emotion*

A person will “choose a given alternative that describes a course of action that might satisfy the goal” (p. 331). Such a goal could be to maintain a particular feeling.

Scores for emotional intelligence tests have been described as “fuzzy sets” (Cobb & Mayer, 2000) because “certain answers are more right or plausible than others, and only some answers are absolutely wrong all the time”. To ensure standard answers it is possible to use “consensus, expertise, or target criteria (or [a] combination)” (p. 16). The frequency of selected answers by the respondents in this case gives the consensus score. Despite criticism of testing, Mayer, Caruso & Salovey (2000) claim the MSCEIT provides the most evidence of emotional intelligence in the scientific field, although Gowing (2001) questions this citing the lack of reliable evidence. This resonates with comments by Matthews, Zeidner and Roberts (2004) that few independent studies on MSCEIT correlations exist. The focus tends to be on the MSCEIT outcomes rather than on the test itself. For example, an Australian study investigated the correlation of emotional intelligence via the use of the MSCEIT with perceived outcomes of leadership in educational establishments. Overall, low MSCEIT scores led to the conclusion that emotional intelligence was not beneficial for predicting leadership outcomes and ought to be avoided when selecting for Australian educational institutions (Grunes, Gudmundsson & Irmer, 2014). Therefore, low scores were accepted without questioning the validity of the MSCEIT or whether it is an appropriate instrument to measure emotional intelligence.

Research which questions the robustness of the MSCEIT is refuted. For example, in response to Maul’s (2012) criticisms on interpretive agreement, the test designers state: the argument for the MSCEIT’s overall validity is growing and arguably quite strong, notwithstanding the technical imperfections that are a part of any real-life form of measurement, and acknowledging that improvements in the MSCEIT and measurement in the area are desirable (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2012, p. 407).

Whilst the MSCEIT has been utilized in research in educational settings, there are few studies focused on headteachers or teachers and even fewer which include both the MSCEIT and qualitative interviews. Therefore this investigation set out to find out the ways in which female school leaders were emotionally intelligent and whether it was possible to test for emotional intelligence.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative approach to the investigation was taken over a six year period to enable the collection of rich data through an inter-subjective perspective, with the sample being treated as subjects, as opposed to objects. Being researched in this way can empower rather than take advantage of an individual (Morrison, 2007). Seven female secondary headteachers were selected from across six local authorities situated in four geographical regions in England, UK. The sample was opportunistic through spotting relevant and potential individuals (females leading secondary schools) to participate in the research (Mertens, 2014). The headteachers were at various stages of their careers and were leaders of a diverse range of secondary schools. Key details are summarized in Table 1. During and since completion of data collection, all schools converted to academy status, therefore receiving their funding directly from the Department of Education or their sponsor rather than the local authority.

The longitudinal investigation although qualitative in its approach, made use of quantitative data. Thus methodical tools encompassed psychometric tests, namely emotional intelligence measurement tools as well as semi-structured interviews. The interviews were held pre- and post-psychometric tests to explore the headteachers' emotional labor. Data was also generated from interviews of a small number of teachers (five per school, but only three included in this paper) who were led by the headteachers. To protect the participants' identities they are given pseudonyms, the teachers are Denise, Helen, and Robert and the headteachers are Emma, Julie, Kate, Mandy, Maya, Sue and Vicki.

*TABLE 1 SHOULD APPEAR ABOUT HERE*

For the purposes of this paper the headteachers' responses from the MSCEIT and their semi-structured interviews were specifically investigated, along with semi-structured interviews for three teachers. The three teachers were interviewed once in year five of the wider study in relation to how they felt about their roles in school. The seven headteachers each completed the MSCEIT once during year four. Individuals were given instructions in how to complete the test and their subsequent reports were issued from the MSCEIT administrators Multi-Health Systems. Semi-structured interviews pre-test focused on the headteachers' self-reported emotional responses and for post-test the MSCEIT scores and the test content were

explored. Table 2 outlines the structure of the MSCEIT, where the four ability branches are split into eight test sections covering 141 items of multiple choice questions.

*TABLE 2 SHOULD APPEAR ABOUT HERE*

With the investigative theme being about emotions, the role of emotion in research played a part in the study (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000), where interpretive situations relied on cognitive connections and thus the researcher made impressionist judgements (Jaggar, 1989). This consideration of emotion allowed the researcher to reflect upon feelings when analyzing the experiences of the sample, but she was mindful to manage her own feelings encountered as a direct consequence of the research (Gilbert, 2001). Analysis of the semi-structured interviews included scrutinizing the responses for commonalities and emerging themes. This approach focusing on the narrative of day-to-day experiences resonates with ‘craftsmanship’ (Kvale, 2002) where findings are continuously checked and interpreted. Recognizing that emotion can be a beneficial part of the research process where emotion can lead a researcher to see the researched needs to be considered alongside possible implications as emotion may impact on reason (Gilbert, 2001). However, the focus remains on teachers’ and headteachers’ emotions where their responses are crystallised to give deep understanding (Richardson, 2005) as the evaluation of the data occurs in the reading of the text (St. Pierre, 2005) to provide a ‘credible account’ (Richardson, 2005, p. 964).

Therefore data generated as a result of completion and scoring of the MSCEIT comprise the findings, which are supplemented by interview responses. MSCEIT scores were awarded based on the participants’ abilities to:

*Identify* the emotions expressed by a face or in designs;

*Generate* a mood and solve problems with that mood;

*Define* the causes of different emotions;

*Understand* the progression of emotions; and

*Determine* how to best include emotion in our thinking in situations that involve ourselves or other people (Caruso, 2006, p. 2, emphasis in the original).

An aggregate MSCEIT score gave a total emotional intelligence score as well as two area scores (experiential and strategic emotional intelligence). The four branch scores and the subsection scores were also revealed. Individual reports were illustrated by charts and graphs,



alongside brief generic explanations, but omitted personalized reasons for the scores awarded. The aim is for the scores to be regarded in the same way as for those awarded for traditional intelligence, therefore an average of those completing the MSCEIT is 100 with a standard deviation of 15 (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2006). The findings are presented under the relevant sections of the test.

## **Findings**

### *Total emotional intelligence scores*

In line with the normative sample, the overall MCEIT scores within the range of 50 to 100 indicates an individual should consider developing their emotional intelligence, whilst an average score of 100 would be classed as competent and a score of over 100 is recognized as high performance. Average scores indicate an overall capacity to reason with emotion and to use emotion to enhance thought. The total, area, branch and task scores for the headteachers can be seen in Table 3.

### *TABLE 3 SHOULD APPEAR ABOUT HERE*

Only Emma passed the competent level of emotional intelligence, moving into high performance, whilst Maya reached a competent level of performance and Julie was awarded the lowest score at 67. The following draws on the headteachers' MSCEIT reports and these are supplemented by interview responses from them and from some of the teachers in their schools.

### *Area scores*

The area scores are for experiential emotional intelligence and strategic emotional intelligence; acting on emotional feelings and responses, deliberate handling of emotions where they are managed with thought and over time, respectively. The reports omit personal analysis in relation to how the headteachers responded to the questions and tasks, which apply to experiential intelligence, Emma is the only headteacher registering as a high performer, whilst the remaining six headteachers failed to reach the competent level. Emma explained her role was to “see what can be improved and if it feels right, then I will do it and take risks because there is nothing to lose”. Robert, one of her assistant headteachers supported Emma's actions, “I like working in this environment, the school improvement plan is tough, but I feel a strong sense of loyalty to our team, we are encouraged to share what we

think”. This finding supports the notion that Emma’s outlook is generally positive and according to Twyford, Le Fevre and Timperley (2017) having a positive emotional state heightens risk taking. Mandy shared a sense of risk taking, “being the headteacher means I’ve got to take risks, but fortunately I’m confident that I’ll get the outcome”. Thus Mandy demonstrated she was able to deliberately act on her emotions and feelings, although she also recognized the need to consider others’ emotions. Mandy explained, “I find it interesting working with other people ... one minute I’m pushing staff but [I] have to think when to ease off”.

### *Branch scores*

#### *1. Perception of Emotion*

The first branch score of perceiving emotion checks a participant’s barometer to how others are feeling via their expression, gesture and tone of voice. The scores ranged from Julie, scoring the lowest at 50 to Emma scoring 112. Low figures might mean that someone has difficulty in reading people accurately; who over analyses reading faces and pictures in the test, not being attentive to non-verbal cues, or may resist ascribing negative emotions to people. Whilst Julie had the lowest score, in both her pre- and post- test interviews she recalled her actions in how she helped members of her staff in difficult circumstances. A member of Julie’s staff was suffering from a medical condition, Denise appreciated the support she was offered and explained “I don’t know how she knew, I’ve not told anyone and tried to hide it but I feel much happier now it is in the open”. In order to develop this aspect of emotional intelligence, Caruso (2006) suggests individuals monitor their awareness of their emotional environment and that they should become aware of the emotions around them. What is clear, is that Julie’s interview responses and Denise’s comments contradicted Julie’s low test score. All headteachers made reference to their staff and their well-being, Maya illustrated this in her statement that “I try hard to understand what they are thinking and feeling”. Vicki echoed the need to perceive others’ emotions, to “understand the kind of ways in which people operate ... recognize people’s needs [to get] a win”. Perceiving emotions in this way contributes to facilitating thought.

#### *2. Emotional Facilitation*

Facilitating thought utilizes feelings to augment cognitive systems and is useful for initiating solutions, making decisions and being creative. Ordered thoughts can lead to logical approaches. However, negative emotions can interfere with cognitive processes, in particular

fear and anxiety. Emma and Maya reached beyond competent level for this score. The remaining headteachers had scores in the 'consider developing' range, although none of these scores were below 87, which was scored by Mandy and Julie. Even though Kate's score suggested development, she was very clear in that nothing phased her, "I make conscious decisions and I'm always thinking of solutions". A higher score might have been expected of Vicki, who in both pre- and post-test interviews talked through thoughts and planned activities for her school. "I don't struggle with what are the priorities for the school, what should be the ethos of the school because I understand something about learning ... it's how you come at it, rather than seeing it as a massive burden, it's a bit challenging and there are days when one makes difficult decisions" (Vicki). Vicki's response, in which she describes the skills of initiating solutions and making decisions, is another example of a participants' interview contradicting her MSCEIT score. Caruso and Salovey (2004) explain reflecting on emotions, allows thinking to be influenced by emotion. They suggest an individual could determine how feelings influence thinking and that an individual should adapt accordingly. Indeed, Maya noted "I was just thinking at what point [is it that] I realize the benefits of my emotion at a particular instance ... it has impact on what I do, I never show emotion, even when I'm bricking it". Maya thus allowed herself to recognize fear, but was able to control it and not be affected by negative emotion.

### *3. Understanding Emotion*

Understanding emotions allows categorization and a realization how emotions can fester and intensify. No personalized information is provided other than the confidence interval, for example, for Maya her interval score was 95 to 118 and for Kate and Sue who had the same score, their confidence interval was 85 to 107. Kate commented in her pre-interview that she could always imagine herself in her next role and had very clear ideas of what she wanted. She admitted she had no work-life balance as she gave her all to her job, however, she also revealed that in her current position she had to tackle the "old guard" who tried to block changes stating "it's difficult, but has to be done". Since Kate's reflections indicated how she was proactive and was prepared to confront situations, a higher MSCEIT was expected. Kate explained "in this job, there is nowhere to go to offload, I have taught myself not to internalize emotions which drag me down". Caruso and Salovey (2004) comment that to understand emotions requires an exploration of the reasons behind feelings and an individual should contemplate changes in feelings if situations alter. A higher score than 98 for understanding emotion was expected for Emma who talked about getting "amazingly

anxious” but explained she took steps back as she said she needed “to think why”. This consideration led her to believe “actually I can do this”. Emma evaluated ‘what if’ scenarios and considered emotions as she strived to imagine an outcome. This approach is different to actually managing emotion.

#### *4. Managing Emotion*

For managing emotions to occur, one has to be aware of emotional information and rationalize when it is appropriate to take action, in a proactive rather than reactive manner. It is more about utilizing emotions than suppressing them. The overall range for the headteachers in managing emotions was 79 to 97. These scores placed the headteachers at the higher end of ‘consider developing’ range. Advice for these scores, is to consider root causes of problems and appropriate actions to solve them. However, the headteachers gave examples where they managed their emotions, thus revealing they might be handling situations better than their scores indicate. For example, Sue discussed her divorce and how she managed her emotions in the work place at what she called a traumatic time, “I was doing a very demanding job ... and was able to ignore all emotional trauma and stay focused, I seem able to do that quite well”. Whereas Maya stated “there have been times when I have been in panic, but I managed that emotion, never showed it”. Facing a school inspection Maya explained how she encouraged and empowered her staff, “I had to be calculated in my responses, got them geared up ... it was a cracking report ... saying ‘well done’ to the staff was emotional”. Overall, discrepancies emerged for the headteachers’ branch scores in comparison to their interview responses, thus it was necessary to explore their task scores.

#### *Task scores*

Individual task scores encompass eight tasks. With the report guidelines suggesting a cautious approach due to unreliable results, six task areas are reported. For the branch of perceiving emotions, there is a faces task and a pictures task. For the faces task, it is intended to capture how one perceives emotions based on deciphering emotion by looking at facial appearance. The headteachers’ scores revealed a great variation in range, with Julie registering a score of 48 and Emma scoring 143. The scores indicate Julie should develop in this area as she might not acknowledge others’ emotions, but responses from her teachers counteract this finding as Denise claimed “she takes an interest and if you look miserable she’ll ask”. This suggests dissonance between the interview data and the MSCEIT score. The high scores perhaps suggest an ability to ‘read faces’ with accuracy (Caruso, 2006). Emma

may have scored highly due to the time taken on the test, she explained she looked hard at the faces. Emma took longer in response than the other headteachers. Vicki advised “I use my deputy head as my sounding board, she listens, I watch her face and before I’ve finished talking, I’ll already know if it’s a good idea or not”. Vicki’s score for this task was in the considering developing range, as shown in Table 3 yet her interview responses suggest Vicki was attuned to reading faces.

For the facilitation task the report informed the respondents that a variety of moods contribute to finding solutions to problems, as how one feels impacts on ensuing actions. The scores ranging from 87 to 115, perhaps demonstrate how the headteachers use emotions to influence their decision-making and their subsequent actions, there were no very low scores awarded, indicating that for this task, they were almost reaching the average level or in the case of Emma and Maya, they were registered at high performance level. In her pre-test interview Maya explained, “it’s all about winning hearts and minds”. Given Maya’s response, a higher score was expected and perhaps also for Vicki who described how getting staff on board was important. On winning an achievement award, she recalled “I called the staff together and held up the award and said ‘You’ve just done this for your work’ ... I want them to get fulfilment from their work”. Vicki thus demonstrated her awareness of emotional engagement of others, which requires her to understand emotions.

The two tasks to evaluate understanding emotions are the changes task and the blends task. The changes tasks quantifies an awareness of being subjected to emotions which might be conflicting. The changes tasks register how one understands and deals with changes in emotional states, their connection and transitions (Mayer et al., 2006). Maya scored the highest with 99 and Mandy scored the lowest at 80. Although the respondents did not pass the competent level at 100, the changes task revealed one of the narrowest ranges of results across the headteachers. In follow up interviews, responses made the MSCEIT scores appear low. For example, Sue discussed how she had to deal with different aspects of her role which meant she had to “deal with conflict on a daily basis”. One of her teachers, Helen, acknowledged, “I don’t know how she does it, she multitasks and finds solutions, even when I disagree, I find myself saying ‘yes’ and even changing the way I feel about things, it’s all about what’s best for the pupils at the end of the day”. Mandy detailed how she changed how she felt accordingly, “I’ve always had security in my own ability and what I feel about

myself, but I'm not outgoing, people wouldn't view me as being an extrovert, but then if something needs doing I will push for it, yeah, I conflict".

As with the above changes tasks, Mayer et al. (2006) explained the blends task also derived from understanding emotions, meaning one can associate emotions to situations with accuracy. Therefore the MSCEIT aims to see how well a respondent would match several emotions "such as joy and acceptance" (Gowing, 2001, p. 106) to a particular emotion. Overall, the blends task yielded the highest results thus far, with four of the headteachers, Maya, Vicki, Sue and Emma, all scoring over 100 and Kate one point away at 99. Maya commented in her post-test interview "I realize the benefits of being aware of my emotions at a particular instance ... you realize that to understand yourself you need to understand your own emotions". This was a view shared by all and Sue admitted "you get better results if you make an emotional connection" and Mandy commented "it's a kind of sense of adventure, a journey together and sometimes very emotional, but staff know where I am coming from". This perhaps ought to indicate that the headteachers have an understanding of emotions but with the figures being higher in this task than the main branch of understanding emotions, the test designers advise caution, it is therefore difficult to draw a conclusion. The next tasks are designed to discover if the headteachers can manage emotions.

With the headteachers demonstrating the ability to understand emotions, it was assumed they would also demonstrate the ability to manage them. This part of the MSCEIT sought to reveal the efficiency of different actions towards realizing solutions that required one to regulate their emotions (Mayer et al., 2006). The highest scores for this task showed Maya at 101, with Julie scoring the lowest at 77. The remaining headteachers were close to being within the competent range but did not achieve the average score. The scores for understanding emotion and managing emotion indicate that even if an individual can recognize emotion, they may not have the ability to manage emotion. Interview responses appear to contradict the scores for the headteachers as all talked about recognizing, managing emotion and putting on a performance. Maya described her role as being a performer "when you are in front of 30 children suddenly ... if you have had a bad night, something's happened and you're upset ... it all goes out of your head and you're there for the children ... you're performing ... I think I am an actress". Sue revealed "I perform all the time, I take on every role, in fact playing different parts is necessary". Managing emotions in this way considers how an individual manages relationships with others.

The emotional relations task involves judging the efficiency of different actions taken by self, or with others. The scores were lower than anticipated based on interview responses Emma scored the highest at 98, close to competent level; Maya scored the lowest at 84, a surprising finding considering that Maya had the second highest MSCEIT total score. All the headteachers had spoken of taking decisions and not all their decisions had gone according to plan, for example Vicki expressed her and her leadership team “sometimes just get it wrong”. Maya talked about monitoring the climate of the staffroom “I work on those who oppose everything and get them on board, I’ve learnt to, my first ideas for the school didn’t go down well”. Whereas Mandy discussed her confidence in relation to taking decisions “I seem to be doing things which have taken us in the right direction, I can see a bit of progress”. Mayer et al. (2006) however, expressed concern when they stated “[r]emember that Task scores are rough approximations of one’s actual ability in these areas. These scores have much greater variability than do your other MSCEIT scores” (p. 9). In discussion of their MSCEIT scores, the headteachers’ shared concerns in relation to the test content.

#### *Difficulties in completing the MSCEIT*

After completion of the MSCEIT, all the headteachers commented that they did not understand certain questions. Julie revealed her answers would be interesting given her lack of understanding as she misread some of the questions. Question 2 in Section F, reproduced with permission, illustrates this lack of understanding:

Instructions: For each item below, you are asked to imagine feeling a certain way.

Answer as best you can, even if you are unable to imagine the feeling.

Imagine feeling content on a wonderful day, with terrific news about your job and family. How much is the feeling of contentment like each of the following sensations?

	Not Alike		Very Much Alike		
a. warm	1	2	3	4	5
b. purple	1	2	3	4	5
c. salty	1	2	3	4	5

All the headteachers made comments about this description, particularly ‘purple’ and ‘salty’ which they said they did not understand. They also had problems understanding Question 4 in Section F, reproduced with permission:

Imagine you are feeling loud, large, delicate, and bright green. How much is that feeling like each of the following?

	Not Alike		Very Much Alike		
a. excited	1	2	3	4	5
b. jealous	1	2	3	4	5
c. afraid	1	2	3	4	5

Sue made reference to this this question, she stated “the question asking me to feel large, I feel large all the time, I didn’t get this, so I went down the middle”. Others made reference to how they were supposed to feel ‘bright green’. This lack of understanding raises questions as to the accuracy and validity of the scores.

In other questions, the headteachers said they reflected on the possible answers, but Emma commented, “I don’t have that much time to think when dealing with situations so I’m not sure my answer is true to how I’d act”. Therefore, when decisions are made in the lived reality, time for reflection is not always available. This is illustrated by Question 2, from Section H, reproduced with permission:

Roy’s teacher has just called Roy’s parents to say that Roy is doing poorly in school. The teacher tells Roy’s parents that their son isn’t paying attention, is being disruptive, can’t sit still. This particular teacher doesn’t do well with active boys, and Roy’s parents wonder what’s really going on. Then the teacher says that their son will be left back unless he improves. The parents feel very angry. How helpful to their son is each of these reactions?

Response 1: The parents told the teacher that this was a big shock to them since this was the first time they had ever heard there was a problem. They asked to meet with the teacher and also requested if the principal could attend the meeting.

- a. Very ineffective
- b. somewhat ineffective
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

Response 2: The parents told the teacher that if she continued to threaten to have their son repeat the grade, they would take it up with the principal. They said, “If our son is left back, we will hold you personally responsible. You are the teacher and your job is to teach, not to blame the student.”



- a. Very ineffective
- b. somewhat ineffective
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

Response 3: Roy’s parents hung up on the teacher and called the principal. They complained about the teacher’s threats and asked their son to be moved to a different classroom.

- a. Very ineffective
- b. somewhat ineffective
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat effective
- e. Very effective

With relevance to their daily roles, this question resonated. Kate commented, “it’s a familiar problem, everyone has an opinion, but ‘left back’ what does this mean? I assumed to stay for a detention ... but it clearly means left behind for a year, this is very rare in England, it’s not an option in my school”. Another question the headteachers found difficult was Question 4, in Section B, reproduced with permission:

Instructions: Please select a response from each item

What mood(s) might be helpful to feel when figuring out what caused a fight among three young children? Each of the three young children is telling a different story about how the fight started. Figuring out what happened required attending to the details of the stories and weighing many facts.

	Not Useful		Useful		
a. happiness	1	2	3	4	5
b. surprise	1	2	3	4	5
c. sadness	1	2	3	4	5

“How young is young?” was Vicki’s response to the question. She compared it to an incident in school “having dealt with the aftermath of a fight on the corridor, a teacher brought a boy to me in my office demanding me to ‘sort him out’, I’m not sure any of the moods to select from were helpful to me” (Vicki).

The post-interviews indicated that where possible, the headteachers tried to align their work in their answers. It is not clear how much of their personal lives or their work lives influenced their responses as Mandy illustrated “I’m quite different actually ... to some extent I bring elements of [home] life to school ... I can have more than one life ... I think I’m quieter at home”. Vicki explained that from Friday evening to Sunday she got back to being herself,

whilst Kate acknowledged she felt human by Monday morning. With the majority of the headteachers scores in the 'consider developing' to competent range and with none reaching high performance, it is clear, the headteachers responded differently to the tasks. However, their interview responses regarding the test questions warrants further investigation of the construction of the MSCEIT.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this paper was to explore the sample of headteachers' emotional responses through the administration of the MSCEIT and semi-structured interviews with the aim of finding out in what ways they were emotionally intelligent. An implication of the MSCEIT, is that it is difficult to analyze the headteachers' reports in a fair and consistent manner. This is because the origins of the scores (or exactly how they came about) is less noticeable than other emotional intelligence tools and the results detailed in Table 3 contradict their interview responses. Therefore it is possible assumptions have been made in generalizing aspects of emotional intelligence (Maul, 2012). However, the principal finding was that overall, the MSCEIT scores as shown in Table 3 were low. An example of low MSCEIT scores featured in an episode of the UK's BBC2 documentary series "Horizon" (2007), where a sample of high achievers displayed different forms of intelligence respective to their fields (including a musical prodigy, a quantum physicist, an artist, a dramatist and an RAF pilot). On completion of the MSCEIT, the EI Insider (2007) reported "[i]nterestingly, all but one of the participants scored below average on their overall [emotional intelligence] score. Only one participant scored above average overall" (online).

Acknowledging these low scores leads to two possible conclusions, the respondents have low emotional intelligence ability or the MSCEIT is flawed. If the MSCEIT results are accurate, then overall the headteachers are generally low in their emotional intelligence. This is at odds with the interview responses and evidence confirmed by the UK Government's Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) stating all seven headteachers are 'excellent' leaders and 'excellent' managers of people. The MSCEIT may not be a trustworthy indicator of the emotional intelligence of headteachers in England. This is assuming Ofsted reports are reliable and excellent leaders are attuned to theirs and others' emotional intelligence. Reference to Ofsted is made as there are no other public documents which detail and grade the leadership of a school. However, there are criticisms of the reliability of Ofsted inspections (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996) or other accountably measures, for example a headteacher

might be putting on a show (Oplatka, 2017; Perryman et al., 2017). If, in this instance the MSCEIT is flawed, reasons could include test construction, the mood of the candidate under the test conditions, the language of the test or that it represents a deficit model.

To claim the test does not work well because it has not been reliably constructed is impossible without having full knowledge of the design process. The interpreter agreement and measures to validate the MSCEIT give recognition to the considerable efforts made by the designers in their quest to produce an emotional intelligence test (Mayer et al., 2000, 2012). However, in the process of conducting the MSCEIT there is no way of knowing how an individual's mood at the time of test completion compares with the thoughts, feelings and actions taken by the headteachers in their daily roles. For example, sitting undisturbed for a period of time to complete the MSCEIT, whether at work or at home, is undoubtedly different to carrying out the school leadership role when faced with a number of simultaneous issues and subsequent decision-making.

Therefore, there might be discrepancies with how an individual responds to the questions, as to how they would act in the moment of lived reality. Emma completed the MSCEIT at home and took much longer than the other headteachers, Julie completed it in the working day and in half the time Emma had taken. In answering the questions they could associate the scenarios with similar events in their schools and think back to how they might do things differently by attaching retrospective knowledge and understanding (Cliffe, 2016). This affects not only their personal interactions throughout the day, but also the schools they lead. Their emotional responses whether controlled or not, consciously or subconsciously impact on the systems in their organizations which in turn filters to their teachers and pupils to influence their emotional states. In addition, the headteachers may have awareness of their emotional intelligence that will impact their responses. For example Vicki revealed "I took my own leadership team away for a Friday and Saturday ... and did some work on emotional intelligence with them and even my most hardened cynic ... said to me 'that was very interesting'". Emotional intelligence changes with experience and "can be nurtured and improved ... people pursue emotional strategies as well as rational ones" (Zohar & Marshall, 2004, p. 64). Even if the headteachers operated with knowledge of emotional intelligence, it did not impact on achieving high scores. It is possible there were issues with the instrument's language.

The language of the instrument is crucial in communicating the tasks. Language is also “a ‘system of representation’ for perception and thinking ... it directs how we experience reality” (Bennett, 1997, p. 16). The lived reality can be affected by being culturally immersed in a country. This resonates with Greenfield’s (1997) concerns about ability based instruments, where an instrument’s function, definitions of information and communicating information which “is irrelevant to the immediate situation”, “must be universally familiar” and that “[i]f a test travels, so must the conventions on which it is based” (p. 2). Therefore, it could be argued the MSCEIT is flawed in an ‘English language’ context because of the North American English language used. For example, the normative sample demonstrated competence in emotional intelligence ability were drawn from the USA (Mayer et al., 2006).

This could render the test as culturally sensitive or ambiguous due to a lack of understanding by the English test takers of the language used, indeed, “the sociolinguistic aspects of English in its international context are not well understood” (Kachru, p. 241). To clarify, although the test is constructed in English, it is in American English, therefore the cultural nuances embedded in the English of North America, however slight or minor they appear to be at first sight, seems to be sufficient to negate the validity of the results in this context. For example, we may be imbuing words with different meanings as the headteachers interpreted ‘purple’ and ‘salty’ in different ways. Due to copyright, more examples of terms cannot be given, however, this may possibly explain why there was a lack of understanding of the descriptions which aligns with the nature of language and its manifestations (Kristeva, 1984), and the signifying process (Leche, 1994) that leads to a questioning of the language (Moi, 1986). Questioning language in the context of professional capital allows for recognition of cultural identity where it is expected that variation will exist in different countries, languages may be similar but manifest in different outcomes when applied to varying contexts (Shirley, 2016). A lack of understanding contributes to the notion the test operates as a deficit model (Robinson, 2006).

Operating as a deficit model, the MSCEIT captures deficiencies, emphasizing more on what is ‘missing’ (leading to low emotional intelligence scores). This is in contrast to testing or measuring what is ‘present’, as in an assets model (Robinson, 2006) whereby the emphasis is on positive experience (which could demonstrate competent emotional intelligence scores). The deficit and asset models in this context are derived from Cunningham and Mathie’s (2002) “Asset-Based Community Development”, which is an approach to community-based

learning, whereby the assets, skills and talents, of both the individual and the community are appreciated and mobilized. Therefore, the community is driven without external agencies as the model focuses on positive aspects rather than on problems and needs. This approach aligns with the theories of professional capital and particularly in the “social capital of trust, interaction, shared purposes, and collaborative relationships” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2017, p. 74). The evidence to support this argument is best illustrated by the questions regarding facial expressions. For example, photographs are displayed and the test taker has to decide how much each feeling is expressed by the face on a one to five scale.

The ‘right’ answers to these questions were obtained initially by the majority response, which became the normative sample. The test could be focusing on the respondents’ ‘wrong’ answers, therefore a deficit emphasis is given, whereby the test exploits what is missing or absent in terms of a respondent’s emotional intelligence ability, rather than what is present. Another example features questions showing pictures from landscapes, to abstract design, the test takers are asked to respond to the different given feelings expressed by the pictures on a scale depicted by cartoon faces. This example appears to offer opportunity for the respondents to provide the ‘wrong answers’, which would lead to low emotional intelligence scores.

The admission by the headteachers that they found some of the tasks difficult or confusing, questions the accuracy of the MSCEIT and thus is an implication of the original aim of the wider study in using the test to investigate in what ways female school leaders are emotionally intelligent and indeed if it is possible to test for emotional intelligence.

## **Conclusion**

The comments in this paper are based on a very small sample which is a limitation of the study. However, whilst it is recognized scientific research has been invested in the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2012), it is possible that its use in this study has not provided a true and reflective picture of the headteachers’ emotional intelligence. Under the global term of emotional intelligence, concepts featured in the MSCEIT may be lost in translation through operating as a deficit model as participants struggle with their interpretation of the questions being comprised of culturally sensitive and nuanced language, thus the MSCEIT is not universally understood (Greenfield, 1997).

Arguments have been made that an individual's intelligent use of emotions develops and occurs over time as a result of life experiences and career stage (Arar, 2017; Cliffe, 2016) and with this in mind, it is perhaps best to view the MSCEIT as a vehicle to make improvements rather than to arrive at a fixed score. Emotions are subjective and reflecting back at actions taken brings retrospective meaning (Cliffe, 2016) and perhaps unconsciously or consciously shapes behavior moving forward. In addition, cultural experiences contribute to shaping a headteacher's emotional reactions. Individuals from different cultures respond according to their values and beliefs as they invest in professional capital for the good of their localized communities. With the changing educational landscape in England and the rise of academies and their federations, allegiances and multi academy trusts, professional capital will benefit these communities. Consequently, there is an opening for future research in how headteachers perceive, facilitate, understand and manage their and others' emotions for the benefit of their communities. As schools continue to be converted to academies and with many being run by private companies, there is a need to consider decisional capital. With businesses appointing 'executive' headteachers running a number of academies and being superior to headteachers, decisional capital is required to value headteachers and enable them the opportunities to make decisions about their work and allow them to engage in social capital. Emotions are invested in social capital as the social networks and interaction of teachers impact on the education of their pupils and consequently on human capital as educational investment plays out in the communities.

There is also scope for further investigation in how headteachers' abilities are captured to enable them to intelligently make use of emotions for the good of all, given the implications universal instruments designed to measure abilities bring. Further studies on headteachers' emotions can contribute to existing research on leadership theory and practice. Coupled with social capital centering on teachers working for the good of their pupils and communities, intelligent use of emotions by headteachers has the power to change lives.

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