EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN BOARDING SCHOOLS: PERSPECTIVES OF MRSM TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

As a new and young nation gained independence 50 years ago, there are many expectations about the new generation of citizen. One main foundation of building nationhood is in the area of education. Leaders, parents, employers and people on the street are talking about the state of education of the nation. Discussing about education, the focus would be the teachers – the engineers of tomorrow. What is their aspiration and conditions? Are they well equipped with the right tools, aptitude and attitude? Recent reports on teachers disruptive behaviors in the mass media called for urgent attention from the educational stakeholders. The increase in numbers of reported cases of misbehaving teachers would suggest many interlocking factors. One of the factors that may affect the teachers' behavior is emotional stability. Emotional stability is crucial in facing challenges in the school environment. This study is trying to explore how the Malaysian teachers look at the emotional intelligence. This study aims to 1) identify components of emotional intelligence, 2) explore patterns that contribute to emotional intelligence, The study is conducted at 3 elite boarding schools which cater to cream of the crops students. Three teachers have consented to be participants in this case study design. The teachers consist are female teachers and their age from 30s and above. They are well experience teachers of more than ten years in service. Interview protocol was developed based on Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence construct. Three in-depth interviews are done. Using the protocol, teachers are asked about the concept of emotional intelligence. Data gathered was analyzed using NUD*IST software. The findings are a combination of what Goleman (1995, 1999) posited and a few new sub-factors emerged. These findings might be the emotional intelligence framework of Malaysian teachers.

Keywords: education, emotional stability, emotional intelligence.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

We are living in a constantly changing world. Individuals have to be flexible in responding to many factors that affect their lives. Those who cannot respond in time may be left behind thus, losing control of their life. They might feel burdened multitasking in a short duration of time. When life demands are more than their ability to cope, then individuals are under pressure (Selye, 1978). Individuals who can flourish under stressful situation do have a coping mechanism which is closely related to an emotional stability (Goleman, 1999). Thus, he/she has a feature of emotional intelligence in him/her.

Emotional intelligence is also called emotional quotient or emotional literacy. This intelligence construct starts gaining a foothold when Howard Gardner (1983) proposed a new paradigm of intelligences. Intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence are among a few other intelligences posited by him. Psychologists (such as Reuven Bar-on, John Mayer, Peter Salovey) are pioneering and exploring the intracacy of emotional intelligence. In the world of logic, reasons and emotions do not mix. Educators are gradually embracing the idea of emotional literacy in educating the young. The existence of emotional stability is essential not only in school but also in the profession as posited by Weisenger (1998:1), "*Emotions…play an important role in the workplace*".

Working in a workplace can have different effects on different people. Emotions like happiness, enjoyment, sadness, boredness affect working conditions differently. These myriads of emotions do have bearing on how we react on a given situation. In order to fulfill our job requirement and perform well above average, individuals need to take charge on how they view life and living. Living chores include maneuvering, manipulating and problem solving. Wechsler (1958: 7) mentioned of intelligence in a general term.

"*Intelligence, operationally defined, is the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposely, to think rationally and to deal effectively with his environment.*"

This definition can be construed as; an intelligent person is an individual who has the ability to reflect and react to many facets of life challenges and obstacles. Moreover, our surroundings is always changing and only those who are adaptable toward changes with a sound minds and a stable emotions can rose higher. Goleman (1996: 91) said "*the emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them*". Goleman

(1996, 1999), Wilks (1998) and Weisenger (2000) agreed that emotional stability (emotional intelligence) is salient in daily lives (working or otherwise). Hence, emotionally intelligent individual understand oneself, relate better toward others and become a good worker such as teacher. In addition to that, intelligence also entail a set of skills of problem solving (Gardner, 1983). A person who has these qualities is well equipped to be a teacher; imparting knowledge and skills to the young. He/she has the confidence and zest of moulding good character and intellectuality into his/her charges.

Lately, teachers are getting flaks left and right for mishandling their students or misbehaving in public. Mass media has been reporting a negative picture of teachers. Disruptive behavior of teachers are not yet rampant but a solution must be found on how to tackle the source of misbehavior.

The study of this paper intend to delve into emotional intelligence of Malaysian teachers. There are a few possibilities on why teacher cannot cope or control emotional outburst in school. Is it because of nonconducive working environment, too many workloads, insensitive administrators or lack of professional help? For instance, too many workloads would make individuals lethargic physiologically and psychologically (Muchinsky, 1997). Teachers who are under this condition could become susceptible to emotional imbalance and behave in disruptive manner. Briskin (1996: 147) highlighted the ever demanding situation in the working environment, "*The work places of today are highly stressful, in part because we don't distinguish between the call for ever-higher performance and the injunction to work people to near their melting point.*" Goleman (1995, 1999) posits a model which described factors influencing emotions. He claimed that success and failure in life revolving around how a person tackles his/her emotion efficiently. There is a correlation between individual performance and emotional stability (Ferdowsian, 2003). Work performance also closely related to work values uphold by those individuals (Vora 1983; Khaleque 1992; Neal 1999; Adkins & Naumann 2001).

1.1   Research Background

Teaching profession has no time-frame for working or not working which means working 24 hours and 7 days a week. (Noriah, 1994). They work at anytime and anywhere when the need arises. This situations might create working pressure which consequently lead to teacher burnout. Research findings (Jowati, 2002 and Chua & Adi Fahrudin, 2002) confirmed the existence of working pressures among school

teachers; while another research (Faridah & Zubaidah, 1999) found that teachers also experienced burnout caused by heavy workload and high work pressure. This pressure keep building up when a person is obstructed to achieve his goals (Bruhn, 1989). Emotional imbalance will occur if this pressure exist in a long duration (Selye, 1978). Consequently, various emotions (such as anger, sadness) would come into play (Muchinsky, 1997). Emotions which run amuck from one extreme to another are not suitable for any individual in a working situation. If we relate this scenario to a teacher teaching in kindergarten or primary school and even in secondary school,; this teacher must be restrained before a lot of damages are done to his underlings. As Bradshaw (2001) says, "*Teachers transform lives and the ripple effect goes on for years.*" Thus, in order to mould younger generation into a model citizen, the mould itself (in this case, teachers) must be faultless or at least near perfect as a role model. Excellent teacher is a teacher who perform his duties beyond his call, and this performance is influenced by his emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1999; Ferdowsian, 2003). Mohd Najib (2000) who did research on emotional state of lecturers in Malaysia university found that these lecturers have average emotional intelligence and not very convincing. He suggested that lecturers must have high emotional awareness so that they can efficiently impart knowledge and skills necessary to future teachers. Their emotions do count in the training of new teachers. He also said that work pressure faced by teachers would result in feeling burnout and unstable emotions. Teachers with negative attitudes and students who have disruptive or destructive behavior. This may create a vicious cycle of anger, lost or apathy in the educational system.

Research by Skovholt dan D'Rozario (2000) found that excellent teachers are well-liked than their colleagues. What traits that this teachers have compared to other teachers? The edges are factors such as empathy and social skills. Teachers who are at ease with students in and out of class are adults who are not filtered out by teenagers. They are loved, trusted and looked up to by teenagers. Bridging the generation gaps help both teachers and teenagers feel comfortable with each other. This findings support statement by DuBois, Alverson and Staley (1979) which said that teachers who have positive values improve their social interactions with students. Traits like loving goes a long way in making students feel appreciated.

1.2   Problem Statement

Teachers are government servants whose task is moulding young (and not so young) generation into a good human beings. They cater to

those who are eligible to enroll in kindergarten, primary school and also secondary school. They are accountable to Ministry of Education and to a lesser degree to the public. Teaching is not a profession to have monetory gains. Anyone who has the teaching qualification can become a teacher; but, not everybody can be an excellent teacher. Teacher should be aware on how the world is changing and education curricular must be dynamic. The ever changing needs of the job market and government policy keep the teachers in the limelight, whether they are capable of delivering what expected of them. The onus is on the teachers to adapt and survive so that the love of teaching is intact. Those who can't cope might feel downcast and burdened. The educational system is complex and sometimes challenging teachers' patience. Thus they need a safety mechanism on how to react to multitude of problems and conflict; intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

Mass media in Malaysia always give attention on what is going on in the school especially if the news reflect badly to the school. There are many reports about teachers who misbehave in class or in public. Abusive teachers, misbehaving teachers, disruptive teachers etc imply that teaching profession has a problem in regulating emotions and maintaining order in schools. Inconclusively, it could indicate teachers unable to develop and attain emotional stability that is required as a major service provider. Eventhough, these reports crop up here and there but, the frequency of occurrence should make us ponder when will we push the panic button. This phenomena could be the result of teachers are not trained to cope with multitude of emotions when facing various problems and shortcomings in schools. To understand this phenomenon, we must learn about the culture of the people, how they are brought up, how they behave and cope in a situation, and the salient factors that form emotional maturity. Comprehending this phenomenon would give us a better picture on how to practice intervention and consequently helping teachers to be better equipped to nurture students. Exploring what is emotional intelligence in Malaysia context by focusing on teachers is quite important for many reasons: i) impact of teachers on students, ii) teachers role as role model, iii) redesign of curricular by the higher authority, etc.

2.0   METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study is to determine or identify aspects of emotional intelligence of teachers in Malaysian context. The study discussed here is the first phase of research on a group of elite teachers of boarding schools. This single-case multi-site exploratory case study design which

is comprehensive enough in data collection and analysis. Moreover, the phenomena is an intricate part of the surrounding (Yin, 1993). The researcher try to identify emotional intelligence factors or factors of teachers.

2.1   Participants of the Research

Three residential school teachers were invited to participate in the research. Purposive sampling was done to identify the participants of this in-depth interview. Their age range was above 35 years old which comprise senior and experienced teachers. All are female participants who volunteered for this exercise.

2.2   Data Analysis

Data from in-depth interviews were managed and analyzed using NUD*IST software. First, data was transcribed into Office Word. Then, a reduction process was done to sieve important data. Themes and subthemes found were coded and analyzed. Data display is done through tree diagram and Venn diagram.

2.3   Instrumentation

Three in-depth interviews were conducted to explore factors of emotional intelligence. All interviews used the same interview protocol. There are about 32 questions that aid interviewers to examine participants' concept of emotional intelligence, Factors of emotional intelligence, and how they cope when facing work conflict or life crisis. The questions were open-ended and interviewers gave cues here and there to promote more responses to those questions. Data was validated using expert review (construct validity) and calculating the Kappa value (reliability). The Kappa value is .80 which implies high consistency of coding process.

3.0   RESULTS

Concept of emotional intelligence of Malaysian teachers is still within the construct of emotional intelligence posited by Goleman (1995, 1999). Eventhough, Goleman (1995, 1999) laid out five factors of emotional intelligence based on western perspective, this research finding is almost similar with the theme plus additional themes. The participants talked about their feelings, actions, inactions, and reactions in a given situation. They learned from fellow teachers by observation or conversation that took place. Cues and body language are learned so

that no individual stepped on other person's toe. Sometimes they have to toe the line, playing safe. Consequently, teachers became more adapt in maneuvering the emotional potholes in the school environment.

Referring to Goleman (1995, 1999), he said that EQ has five factors (self awareness, self regulation, self motivation, empathy and social skills). However, data analysis from in-depth interviews show that there were additional subtheme and theme in understanding EQ. Two new themes and also four new subthemes emerged. Those two themes were spirituality and maturity; and four new subthemes which were intention, interest, helping others, and compassion. Table 1 summarized the factors and subfactors found in the analysis.

Table 1: Emotional intelligence subfactors

Emotional Intelligence Subfactor	Code
i. Self Awareness	SA
a. Emotional awareness	SA - EA
b. Self assessment	SA - ASA
c. Self confidence	SA - SCf
d. Intention	SA – Itt
ii. Self Regulation	SR
a. Self control	SR - SCt
b. Trustworthiness	SR - Twn
c. Coscientiousness	SR - Cct
d. Adaptability	SR - Adp
e. Innovation	SR – Ivt
iii. Self Motivation	SM
a. Achievement Drive	SM - AD
b. Commitment	SM – Cmt
c Initiative	SM - Itv
d. Optimist	SM - Opt
e. Interest	SM – Int
iv. Empathy	E
a. Understand Others	E - UO
b. Helping Others	E - HO
c. Developing Others	E - DO
d. Service Orientation	E - SO
e. Leveraging Diversity	E - LD
f. Political Awareness	E - PA
g. Love and Care	E – Cmp
v. Social Skills	SS
a. Influence	SS - Inf
b. Communication	SS - Com
c. Conflict Management	SS - CM
d. Leadership	SS - Ls
e. Change Catalyst	SS - CC
f. Building Bonds	SS - BB
g. Cooperation and Collaboration	SS - Col
h. Team Work	SS – TC
vi. Spiritual	S
vii. Maturity	M

In-depth interview participants agreed on many subthemes of emotional intelligence such as good intentions, self control, achievement drive, commitment, being optimistic, being religious and showing maturity in interactions.
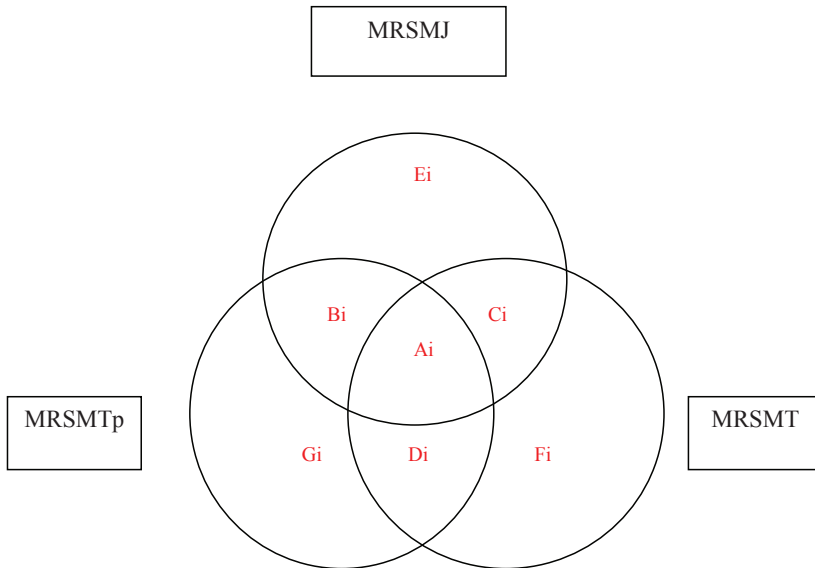

Diagram 1: Venn diagram of in-depth interviews

Diagram 1 displays subthemes in different sections of Venn Diagram. Section Ai shows what all participants from three different schools agreed upon (i.e. intent, self control, achievement drive, commitment, optimist, understand others, building bonds, spiritual awareness, and maturity). Sections Bi show subthemes (adaptability and service orientation) shared by participants from MRSMJ and MRSMTp. Then, Ci illustrates subthemes (trustworthiness, conscientiousness, political awareness, compassion and helping others) shared by participants of MRSMJ dan MRSMT. Di shows subthemes (emotional awareness and self assessment) common to participants MRSMT and MRSMTp. Ei confirms that subthemes like leveraging diversity, influence, conflict management and collaboration emerged from the MRSMJ participant. Fi shows subtheme self confidence surfaced only from MRSMT participant, while, Gi illustrate no standalone subtheme by participant from MRSMTp. Table 2 below gives a detailed part by part subthemes emerged in this interview.

Table 2: Subthemes emergence based on Venn diagram from in-depth interviews

Section	Subthemes Found
Ai	Intent, Self Control, Achievement Drive, Commitment, Optimist, Understand Others, Developing Others, Communication, Building Bond, Spitual, and Maturity.
Bi	Adaptability, and Service Orientation
Ci	Trustworthiness, Conscientiousness, Political Awareness, Compassion, and Helping Others.
Di	Emotional Awareness, and Self Assessment
Ei	Leveraging Diversity, Influence, Conflict Management, and Collaboration
Fi	Self Confidence
Gi	None

Diagram 2 illustrates tree diagram for theme and subtheme of emotional intelligence. This diagram also shows the frequency of each subtheme emerging in the interviews. The higher the subtheme's frequency indicates a higher level of importance to the participants involved.
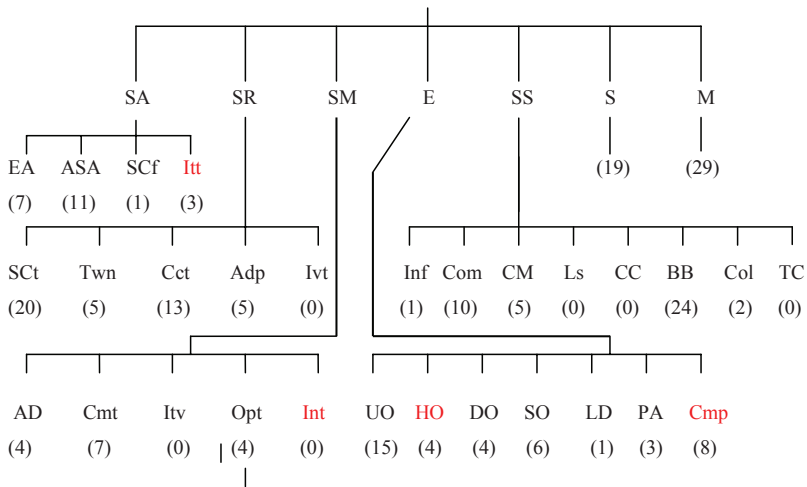
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Diagram 2: Tree Diagram for theme and subthemes: frequencies of emotional intelligence

Studying the tree diagram, most themes have at least one subtheme which is salient. However, there are a few subthemes which are nonexistence in Malaysia context. First, looking at self awareness (SA) theme, accurate self assessment is most salient (*f*=11). However, three

other subthemes also in existance and have some bearing on one's emotion. For instance, emotional awareness is salient in identifying individual's state of emotion before they can assess their wellbeing. Subtheme self confidence exist but barely which shows that the participants lack of confidence or this subtheme is not given its due. Intent is a newfound subtheme for self awareness. The participant believes that intent precedes action. Whatever we do, intent dictates; whether good or bad. Self regulation theme has five subthemes: Self control, trusworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and innovation. Subtheme self control is the most salient with the highest frequency (*f*= 20) and followed by conscientiousness (*f*= 13). It is important to note that there might be a relation between self control and self confidence in self awareness. The question is whether an individual building up self control to compensate for lack of or low self confidence. Only subtheme innovation shows 0 frequency. The question again is whether there is a positive correlation between self confidence and the desire to innovate. Having self confidence entrenched might push individuals to be better and tackle problem in a different perspective. Self motivation theme has 3 subthemes mentioned (commitment *f*= 7, achievement drive f= 4 and optimist f= 4) while two more subthemes are not mentioned. Empathy as the fourth theme has seven subthemes: understand others, helping others, developing others, service orientation, leveraging diversity, political awareness, and compassion. Helping others and compassion are two new subthemes found from in-depth interviews. Understand others has the highest frequency (f = 15) followed by compassion (f = 8). The fifth theme social skills has eight subthemes: influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, collaboration, and team capabilities. Building bonds has the highest frequency (f = 24) followed by communication (f =10). However, three subthemes named leadership, change catalyst, and team capabilities are nonexistence. The researcher also found two new themes named spirituality (*f*= 19) and maturity (*f*= 29). Even though, Goleman (1999) posited that subthemes like innovation, initiative, leadership, change catalyst and team capabilities as part and parcel of emotional intelligence, this research found otherwise. Furthermore, the researcher found four new subthemes (named intent, interest, understand others, and compassion) and two new themes (named spirituality and maturity) as additional components to the construct of emotional intelligence.

4.0   DISCUSSION

Looking at Table 2, all three participants of in-depth interviews agreed on many characteristics of emotional intelligence. They talked about individuals who have goals to achieve with positive intents; adept in controls of emotion; committed to task, driven for higher achievement, always in positive mode; understand others well; developing others' potential, have skills in communicating with peers, superiors and students; good in building relationship and create warm rapport; spiritual at peace; and have maturity in dealing with life ups and downs. Diagram 2 also highlighted subthemes that are considered important in the teachers' life in schools. Accurate self assessment guide teachers on how to fine tune their emotions in regard to students benefit. This virtual dos and don'ts is what makes the teacher behave in various capacities. Self control is another major character of a good teacher. Teaching and moulding young and rebellious human being is a hard work day in day out. Educating people do take a lot of time and perseverance especially the young ones. The feeling of conscientious and commitment makes the teachers diligent in finishing the task given. Even though, teaching is an overwhelming responsibility, school is a place where the espirit the corp and camaraderie develops. Teachers like to socialize and communicate among them about any of issues that interest them. Thus, their level of understandings and compassion about work are boundless. In other words, their integrity as professionals is indisputable. All these criterias discussed are further enhanced by having a high level of maturity and a deep sense of spirituality.

Individuals with positive intention live up to their philosophy of life – to make their environment such as, workplace, family and friends better and enlightened. For them, good intention begets something of value in life. Even though this subtheme is not the original subtheme posited by Goleman (1999), but it is very relevant in a Malaysian society where intention and action are deemed intertwined; prejudged by members of society. Intention or goal of teachers in school is written (as vision and mission) and displayed for internalization to happen. It becomes a common goal of all. Thus, intent is a major part of school culture. Teaching and educating students is not an 8 to 5 job but a 24 hour responsibility (Noriah 1994) to produce a well balanced citizen as established in Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia. 2003). In this national education philosophy (Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan), schools are responsible for developing and enriching four aspects of students' potential: physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual. Thus, this subtheme is crucial and a must have in every teacher.

Teachers are a well-trained adult in teaching subject content to children plus extra responsibility i.e.taking care of students welfare, paperworks etc. A question arises whether they are equipped to handle a multitude of problems cropping up daily in school. Problems and constraints which are beyond the teachers's ability to cope might create continuous life pressures (Selye 1978). Goleman (1999) said that the ability to tackle challenges is closely related emotional stability. Moreover, challenges are never static and emotion has to react to those changes continuously. By having high self control, teachers can be in command on whatever their undertakings. Controls do not meant only from emotional outburst but also from having hiccups in working performance. Thus, self control is a check and balance of internal imbalance and external actions or reactions.

Commitment to task and driven for higher achievement are another virtues of MRSM teachers. As mentioned before, their dedication is beyond the call of duty (excerpts from focus group and in-depth interview). They might believe that other than their own families, their world revolved around and related to the school. They want the best of the students and they also deliver the best of their knowledge and skills. They also must believe that students under their wings could improve and produce good results in the exams. It is a tedious job but who else can do it better.

By always looking out positively and understand others well, make teaching life bearable and interesting. Amount of money in salary sometimes incomparable to the joy of seeing students' success in the national exam. The process of teaching and learning, collegiality between teachers, comradeship, hardships and shortcomings are challenges, happiness, sweats along the way. Looking at the bright side of picture and valuing what and who they have are certainly attained part of emotional intelligence.

Developing others' potential is a good way in a win-win situation. When a teacher identify his peer's potential and grooming it, vice versa then both benefited from this supportive environment. The culture of trust and sense of belonging grow within teaching community. Teacher feels safe and cushioned from negative jibes from outside and feels confident to develop skills needed. Encouragement from colleagues matters. That's why communication comes in handy. Communication skill sorely needed (as been pointed out from these interviews) - skills in communicating with peers, superiors and students. Congruent, clear, and convincing message would eliminate miscommunication or communication breakdown between teachers, student-teacher and also

teacher-administrator. Consequently, relationship among teachers and with others improve and flourish. Rapport and mutual trust developed with sincerity and open heart.

5.0 CONCLUSION

To be or not to be a teacher is not the question in this profession. What they need is a supportive and conducive school climate that enable them to perform and outdo their past achievements. Teachers and students are two inseparable components that make or break the culture of excellence in school. Principal and other school administrators should be proactive, provide the infrastructure, and promote esprit de corp among school members.

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