Trait Emotional Intelligence in the College Classroom

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Trait emotional intelligence (also known as trait EI or trait emotional self-efficacy) is “a constellation of emotion-related self-perceptions and dispositions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies which encompasses emotion-related behavioral dispositions and self-perceived abilities measured via self-report” (Petrides, Perez-Gonzalez, and Furnham, 2007, p. 123).

Why is Trait EI Important?

When college professors actively practice trait EI in the college classroom, they are able to accomplish the following:

- Create a positive and nurturing classroom environment that is psychologically safe (Mortiboys, 2012; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Roy, 2013a; and Roy, 2013b)
- Create and sustain high quality professor/student relationships (Mortiboys, 2012; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Roy, 2013a; and Roy, 2013b)
- Enhanced student engagement (Liff, 2003; Mortiboys, 2012; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; Roy, 2013a; and Roy, 2013b)
  
  - This enhanced student engagement leads to:
  
  - Improved student grades, test scores, and student achievement
  - Increased retention rates
  - Greater student satisfaction with the quality of the learning experience (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011; Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lillis, 2011; and Schweinle, Reisetter, & Stokes, 2009)
Best Trait EI Practices for Immediate Implementation

During the dissertation phase of her doctorate, the author conducted six semi-structured qualitative interviews with award-winning professors, who are individuals who have won awards for teaching excellence. To analyze the interview data, the author performed a thematic analysis, and it is from this thematic analysis that this list of best practices originated. These practices merit immediate implementation in your own classroom in order to enhance your own practice of trait EI.

**Adaptability**—“flexible and willing to adapt to new conditions” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Alter teaching style to appeal to different types of learners
- Use participatory/democratic leadership
- Listen to the feedback of your students and adjust your teaching practices accordingly

**Assertiveness**—“forthright, frank, and willing to stand up for their rights” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Lead with integrity
- Have tough conversations

**Emotion Expression**—“capable of communicating their feelings to others” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Be open with your students about your own feelings

**Emotion Management (Others)**—“capable of influencing other people’s feelings” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Encourage your students at every opportunity
  - Especially non-traditional students, and first-generation college students
**Trait EI in the College Classroom**

*Emotion Perception (Self and Others)—“clear about their own and other people’s feelings”* (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Use interpersonal intelligence by assessing the behavior of your students
- Pay attention to the nonverbal cues of your students
  - Students’ body language provides great insight into their thoughts and emotions

*Emotion Regulation—“Capable of controlling their emotions”* (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Be aware of your own emotions
- Investigate your own feelings

*Impulsiveness (Low)—“reflective and less likely to give in to their urges”* (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Do not make decisions hastily, take the time to sit down and think about them
- Do not fall victim to emotional hijacking (Goleman, 2005)
  - Emotional hijacking occurs when you allow your emotions to overtake your rational thought (Goleman, 2005)

*Relationships—“capable of maintaining fulfilling personal relationships”* (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Get to know your students
  - Keep a clear set of boundaries, because there is a line that you cannot cross
- Do not be afraid to show your students that you care about them
Relationships (Continued)

- Mentor and coach your students
  - Remember “The skills it takes to be a professor [are] equally the same as it takes to be a leader” (Sussan, Ojie-Ahamiojie, and Kassira, 2008, p. 396)

- Use relationship-oriented leadership or referent power
  - No matter what, you must treat every student as a valued member of your class

Self-Esteem—“successful and self confident” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- You are an expert, therefore you have expert power
- Remember, the sign of a true expert is being comfortable enough with yourself and your own knowledge, to confidently say “I don’t know”

Self-Motivation—“driven and unlikely to give up in the face of adversity” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- You can always improve, as the popular maxim goes, “If it’s not broken, fix it anyway”
- You must be hardworking and dedicated, because being a college professor is challenging
**Social Awareness**—“accomplished networkers with superior social skills” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Give your students advice whenever possible
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Get to know your students so that you can find out which students you can joke with and which ones you cannot
  - This is part of having high quality leader-member exchanges (LMX) with your students
    - LMX exchanges—“A social exchange approach to leadership” (Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995, p. 225) in which leaders adapt their leadership style to meet the needs of each follower

**Stress Management**—“capable of withstanding pressure and regulating stress” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Delegate authority to students, it gives them valuable real-world experience, and also lets them learn about themselves
  - Delegating authority to students also lessens the strain on the professor

**Trait Empathy**—“capable of taking someone else’s perspective” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Set a positive emotional environment in the classroom
- See things from the perspective of your students, it opens your eyes

**Trait Happiness**—“cheerful and satisfied with their lives” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Love your job
  - Be aware of the signs of burnout (Mortiboys, 2012)
Trait EI in the College Classroom

**Trait Optimism**—“confident and likely to ‘look on the bright side of life’” (Petrides, 2009, p. 14)

- Set goals for yourself and actively work toward them
  - Have a mindset of achievement, meaning that you should think positively

**How Did These Award-Winning Professors Learn These Trait EI Skills and Techniques?**

The ways in which these award-winning professors acquired their trait EI skills and techniques include:

1. Faculty development efforts at the university or college
2. Formal education
3. Field experiences
4. Their own experiences as a student or student athlete
5. Raising children

**What Results Do Award-Winning Professors Achieve Through Their Use of Trait EI?**

Through their use of trait EI in the college classroom, these award-winning professors are able to achieve:

1. High quality professor/student relationships
2. High quality LMX exchanges with their students
3. Increased student engagement and participation
4. The creation of a positive classroom environment that is conducive to learning
5. Effective teaching
Conclusion

In sum, trait EI in the college classroom is vital to the success of college students (Mortiboys, 2012; and Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010), and as college professors, we must use trait EI in order to create a positive emotional environment in the college classroom. Therefore, in order to enhance the student learning experience, we must appeal to our institutions in order to provide trait EI training to faculty members, so that each of us can enhance our effectiveness as college professors by using trait EI, and create a better learning experience for our students.

Biography and Contact Information

Dr. Shelly R. Roy is an adjunct professor at Fairmont State University/Pierpont Community and Technical College in Fairmont, West Virginia. She earned the degree of Doctor of Executive Leadership from the University of Charleston, in Beckley, West Virginia in 2013. She earned a Master of Science in Strategic Leadership from Mountain State University in 2008, and a Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership from Mountain State University in 2007. Her research interests include emotional intelligence and higher education, emotional intelligence and leadership, virtual leadership, crisis leadership, teaching effectiveness, and many other areas. Please feel free to contact Dr. Shelly R. Roy at sroy1@fairmontstate.edu or by phone at (304) 265-5445.
References


