

Promoting Emotional Intelligence: From Theory to Practice

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Abstract

Parental beliefs and attitudes are deeply ingrained as a result of cultural values. The challenge facing educators and mental health professionals today is to create a new culture and set of norms, which promote greater emotional intelligence that parents can put into practice with their children. A project was conducted to educate twenty-five parents in a four-session workshop format using the workbook titled, *From Adult to Children: Creating a Culture that Nurtures EIQ*. A pre-workshop survey was administered to assess the parents' baseline knowledge of what constitutes emotional intelligence. Following the completion of the class a post-workshop survey was administered to evaluate the outcome of the workshop. In addition, anecdotal responses were recorded for qualitative feedback. The parents who participated in this survey showed an increase in their understanding and application of emotional intelligence practices. Practitioners of School-Based Family Counseling can benefit from this knowledge by offering their own parent education workshops promoting emotional intelligence development in children.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Parent workshop, Theory, Practice

Introduction

Our society, organizations where people work, and family units create the culture in which people function, impacting individuals' social and intellectual development. Not only does culture within the system influence how people function (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), but people can also help create the culture of which they are members. The culture of dominance and competition has been around as long as humankind has been around. Hayes (2012) explains that only the winners are rewarded in our society. Thus, parents and educational systems seek to achieve the highest goals possible, so their children and students can win in our competitive society.

As a result, social and emotional development has been neglected in education. This has contributed to the perpetuation of competition in our society. Thus, the belief that humans are hard-wired to be selfish and are naturally striving to gratify their self-serving needs is widely accepted. However, research in psychology, sociology, and neuroscience has revealed that people are also wired for good (Zakrzewski, 2015). Sung (2010) found that cultural influence impacts emotional intelligence development. It is no longer simply about the traits you were born with, but the experiences you have in life that help contribute to the individual's social and emotional development. Even at the cellular level, epigenetics suggest that environmental factors have life-long effects on physical and mental health (Jacobson, 2009). With the advent of this new knowledge, the educational system is changing to educate the whole child. Shallcross (2015) found in her study that soft skills (i.e., personal skills not measured in schools) such as self-control and social skills help prevent future delinquent behaviors.

However, schools cannot be successful without collaboration across home and school. Soft skills are also associated with emotional intelligence and defined as the ability to self-manage, control impulses, self-actualize, and regulate emotions (associated with intrapersonal intelligence), as well as increase communication skills, empathy, assertiveness, social responsibility and social influence (associated with interpersonal intelligence) (BarOn & Parker, 2002). Children need to experience a culture that promotes emotional intelligence at home as well as at school in order to become adults with emotional competence and high emotional intelligence. Sung (2012) points out that teachers can be trained to promote emotional intelligence in their classrooms. Academic success or increased knowledge is simply not enough today for successfully addressing society's inequities, because every day we see the consequences of social and emotional neglect in the world around us.

School-based family counselors (SBFC) (i.e., professionals who work with children, parents and teachers) are equipped to bridge the gap between home and school. This new direction is to be proactive in promoting psychological and emotional well-being. The following project will inform SBFC about the effectiveness of parent education, highlighting the central role parental knowledge plays in promoting the development of emotional intelligence.

This paper delineates the successful efforts two school psychologists made to recruit parents from a public school district in the South Bay Area of California to participate in a four-session workshop. The authors first discuss the theoretical foundation of emotional intelligence and the parental training gap that exists in current

practice. Subsequently, they introduce the process of the parent training project and the implications for SBFC.

Theories of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a popular but controversial concept, and the definition of it varies depending on the theory used. Cherniss (2010) indicated that there are four dominant theories that are recognized in the field—the “Mental Ability” model (Salovey & Mayer, 1989), the “Emotional and Social Competence” model (Boyatzis, Goleman & Rhee, 2000), the “Trait Emotional Intelligence Model” (Petrides, 2009), and the “Emotional and Social Intelligence” model (Bar-On, 2006). Among all of these models, Sung (2007) used Bar-On's model as the foundation for emotional intelligence assessment. The model consists of five components, which includes *intrapersonal intelligence* (i.e., self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, and independence), *interpersonal intelligence* (i.e., empathy, interpersonal relationships, social responsibility), *adaptability* (i.e., problem solving and reality testing), stress management (i.e., stress tolerance and impulse control), and *general mood* (i.e., optimism and happiness) (BarOn & Parker, 2002). In a qualitative grounded theory study conducted by Sung (2010), she found that the patterns of relationship between parent and child indicated the presence of distinct levels of emotional intelligence.

Based on this model and the integration of psychological theories such as Psychodynamic for self-awareness, Behavioral for self-regulation, Rational-Emotive for thinking and feeling, and Social Psychology for interpersonal, Sung (2012) developed a workbook titled *From Adult to Children: Creating a Culture that Nurtures EiQ*:

Emotional Intelligence Quotient Improvement. The workbook provided parents, caregivers, and other professionals who work with children a general understanding of the various components of Emotional Intelligence as well as the tools they can use to develop it. For example, the workbook can be used to increase self-awareness, communicate effectively, build relationships, solve problems, control impulses, manage emotions, and coach others. Selected pages in this workbook were used in this project to facilitate reflection and interactive exercises.

Literature on Parent Workshops and Trainings

Parent training has been widely used as a standard modality for providing prevention and intervention services to children with developmental disorders, internalizing disorders, externalizing disorders, and many mood disorders (Briesmeister & Schaefer, 2007). Among the programs developed, almost all of them targeted children's problematic behaviors. For instance, Herbert, Harvey, Roberts, Wichowski, and Lugo-Candelas (2013) used a 14-session emotion socialization program to evaluate the effectiveness of this program on reducing preschool-aged children's ADHD symptoms. Gowdini, Pourmohamdreza-Tajrishi, Tahmasebi, and Biglarian (2017) used a 9-session emotion management training for mothers to reduce their children's behavioral problems such as aggression and hyperactivity, anxiety and depression, social maladjustment and antisocial behavior. Moreover, Kehoe, Havighurst, and Harley (2013) proved that a six-week training, two hours each week, on parental emotion awareness, identification, and regulation can increase parents' empathy for their teens and reduce youth from internalizing difficulties.

Though the previous parent trainings demonstrated the effectiveness of symptom reduction through intensive parenting training, these do not provide a strength-based approach. In addition, parents who view mental health as a stigma are less likely to access training that would benefit their personal development and the improvement of their parenting skills. Therefore, this project attempted to train parents to understand the connection between their beliefs, priorities, and actions. A workshop that connects theories to practice is missing in the current research. To bridge the gap, the authors developed this workshop to meet those needs. The workshop sought to achieve the following goals:

1) Help parents increase their self-awareness and better understand themselves from a more comprehensive perspective; 2) Engage in reflective conversation to form new perspectives on parenting skills; 3) Learn new strategies to provide effective support while forming better relationships with their children; and 4) Create an environment that facilitates emotional competence.

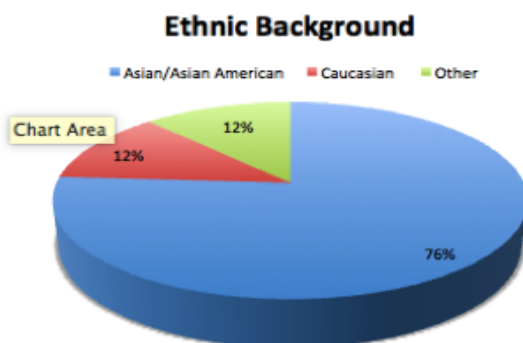
The project- *Emotional Intelligence Parent Workshop*

Recruiting Process. After several consultation meetings, the authors agreed that the training would be free for parents. To cover the costs of the training materials, participants were asked to donate \$20.00 dollars. To assist in the recruitment process, the school district administrative staff sent out an email invitation to parents who had attended a half-day Emotional Intelligence workshop during the previous year, because having this background knowledge was considered beneficial for advancing the training. In addition, flyers about the workshop were sent to school principals, teachers, and were

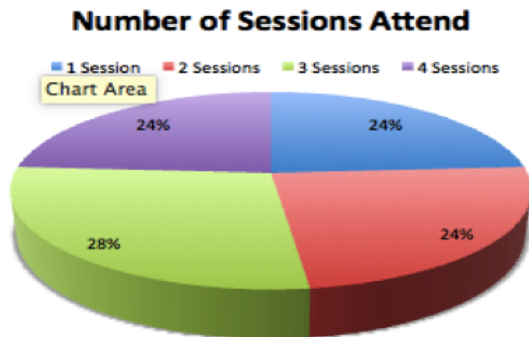
posted on school grounds. The goal of the workshop was to create an environment that nurtured emotional intelligence, and the contents covered in the workshop built on each other. It was made clear in the flyer and the registration link that parents were encouraged to attend all four sessions; additionally, they would be asked to complete a pre and post-workshop survey. More than 40 parents registered for the workshop; however, only slightly more than half actually participated.

Workshop format. The workshops, as planned, were offered once a week for four sessions. Each session lasted for about two hours in the evening, 6-8 pm. The sessions usually started by reviewing the information discussed in the previous session. Parents were asked to reflect on any changes they had observed during the week. After this short review, the authors started introducing new information on emotional intelligence, using a small group format to facilitate in session practice and discussion. Each session had a very interactive nature, involving all parents in this process.

Workshop composition. A total of twenty-five parents actually participated in the workshop. Among them, 32% were male and 68% were female. A closer look at their ethnic background revealed that 76% of the participants were of Asian ethnicity, 12% were Caucasian, and another 12% included Hispanic and mixed-race individuals.



Even though the authors recommended parents attend all four sessions, not everyone had time available for the entire training. Of the 25 participants, over half of them attended three or four sessions, and less than half attended two or just one session.

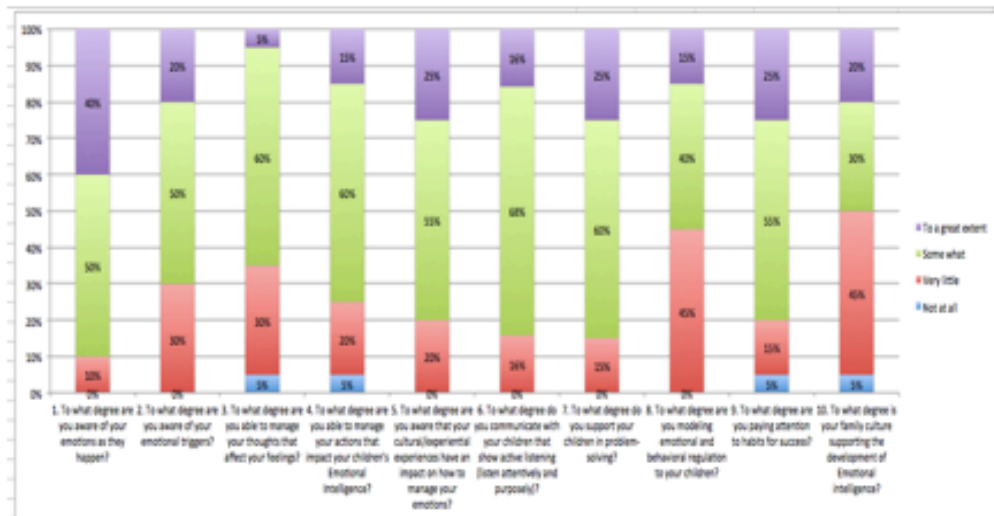


Workshop process and topics. Preceding each session, the two authors met before the workshop and prepared the content of what would be covered. Any changes in the training were meant to improve the quality of the workshop based on the feedback from the previous session. In the initial session, the first author introduced the concept of emotional intelligence and the framework of the training. The concepts of self-awareness and self-actualization were discussed through using different workbook exercises. The following sessions utilized a similar format and included a discussion of topics covering emotional/behavioral regulation and the connection between thinking and emotions. The notion of a culture's impact on an individual's emotional intelligence development was discussed throughout the sessions, which reinforced participants' understanding of the connection between cultural practice and emotional well-being. The final session focused on how these factors impact others and the use of logic and reasoning in problem solving. During this session, the second author sat with the parents and facilitated small group

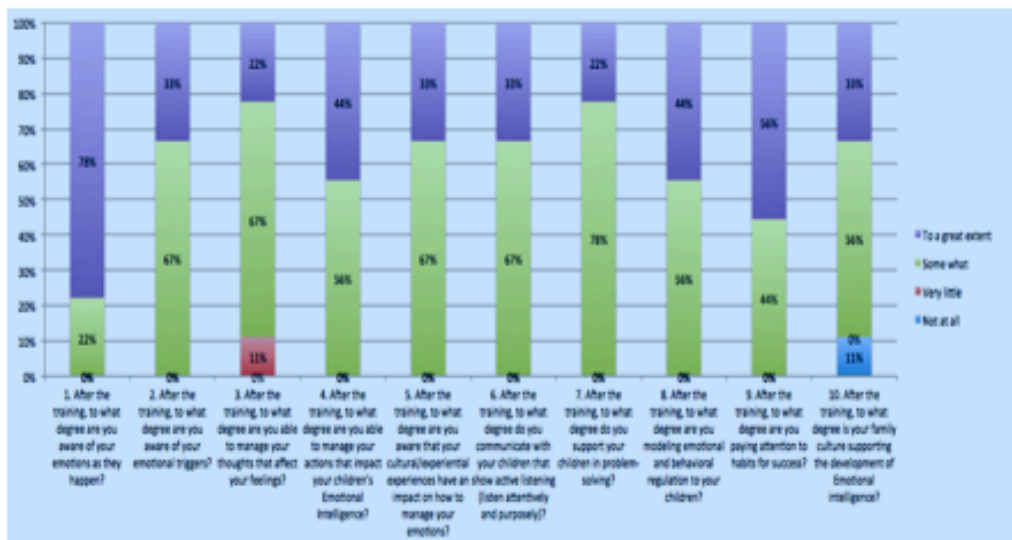
discussions, while the first author provided psycho-educational information and guided the large group discussion.

Pre and Post-Workshop Survey. To monitor the effectiveness of the workshop, the second author created a pre and post-workshop survey in collaboration with the first author to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data measures three key areas (see appendix for specific questions): 1) Participants' awareness of their emotional intelligence; 2) The degree of impact participants' change made on their children; 3) The connection between culture and emotional intelligence. The qualitative data collected documented the participants' direct feelings regarding the training and their personal anecdotes during the training.

Pre-Survey Results



Post-Survey Results



Results. Of the 25 participants, 20 individuals completed the pre-workshop survey questionnaire. The data indicates that most of the participants had some basic knowledge of what emotional intelligence was and were utilizing relevant skills, such as:

active listening and being supportive of their children's problem-solving skills. However, there were two areas where many of the parents showed a need for greater awareness. To be specific, 45% of the parents indicated that they were not modeling emotional and behavioral regulation to their children, and 50% of the parents admitted that their family culture was not supporting the development of emotional intelligence. Parents mentioned that they focused too much on their children's behavior. They did not realize how their own behavior and regulation of emotions was a model for their children to follow.

Compared to the pre-workshop survey results, the post-workshop survey results showed parental improvement in all areas. Ratings indicated improved awareness of participants' emotions and their emotional triggers; almost 90% of the participants reported they were now better able to manage thoughts and actions that affect their feelings; additionally, 100% of the workshop participants indicated an increased awareness of how cultural experiences impact their emotional management. The participants also reported improvement in their communication skills as well as more support of their children's problem-solving abilities. These participants started to demonstrate appropriate emotional and behavioral regulation skills and being good role models for their children; they focused more on their children's habits for success rather than the results of winning the competition, and they began shaping their family culture to embrace the development of emotional intelligence.

The qualitative data showed that parents were able to improve their own emotional intelligence and generalize the skills they learned to not only parent-child interaction content, but also situations across their daily lives (e.g., couple relationships, friendships, working relationships). Moreover, through the workshop, they learned that

they are not alone; the commonality of the struggles they encountered as parents improved their self-esteem and encouraged them to continue learning more effective parenting strategies.

Discussion

From a system's perspective, the emotional intelligence parent workshop can be influential at many levels. Children, as the center of the system, have a direct relationship with their parents and are greatly influenced by the child-parent interaction. When parents are able to increase their self-awareness by understanding how their family culture impacts their thinking, feelings, and behaviors, they are more likely to change their parenting skills.

This project is just one example of the possible learning opportunities for people who care about our children's future. Not only are we influenced by our culture, but also we can create culture through education and training. Emotionally intelligent parents can, therefore, create better family cultures and environments that are safe and supportive of their children's development.

Limitation

One limitation of this project was the limited number of parents participating in the 4-session workshop, which might impact the validity of the result. Among the total number of 25 parents, only half of them stayed for at least 3 sessions. Due to parents' multiple roles and demands, attending a weekly two-hour workshop was a significant time investment. For parents who stayed for all of the sessions, the authors were able to collect their pre and post-workshop survey data, which indicated improvement overall in

their level of emotional intelligence. However, the amount of change for parents who dropped out of the sessions was undeterminable.

Implication for School Based Family Counselors

The content of this training is appropriate for all professionals, who are working in school settings with children and families: such as, SBFC, school/educational psychologists, school social workers, fully certified school counselors, marriage and family therapists, and teachers. The idea of promoting the development of emotionally intelligent individuals through experiential learning drawn from culturally appropriate experiences is universal. This type of training has been most effective when participants used interactive exercises and engaged participants in learning activities (e.g., review, discussion, paired work, reporting out) over time.

The medical model of *diagnose and treat* has been a common practice in education. Social and emotional challenges needed to be significant before counseling and special education programs were available to students. School-based counselors operated under these conditions and their success rate was minimal with a focus on functionality rather than a cure. The new direction for these individuals is prevention and identifying the presence of developmental assets sooner rather than later.

Covitality is a term used to identify assets that support mental health. Early screening (e.g., pre-school) may help prevent future behavioral problems and promote the development of emotional intelligence (Furlong, 2018). Promoting emotional intelligence across home and school is a proactive approach that increases the child's developmental assets and helps to prevent severe emotional issues and challenges throughout an

individual's life's journey. SBFC professionals are ideally placed to assume a central role in operationalizing the development of the social and emotional intelligence for today's school-aged children.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questions

1. To what degree are you aware of your emotions as they happen?
2. To what degree are you aware of your emotional triggers?
3. To what degree are you able to manage your thoughts that affect your feelings?
4. To what degree are you able to manage your actions that impact your children's Emotional Intelligence?
5. To what degree are you aware that your cultural/experiential experiences have an impact on how to manage your emotions?
6. To what degree do you communicate with your children that show active listening?
7. To what degree do you support your children in problem-solving?
8. To what degree are you modeling emotional and behavioral regulation to your children?
9. To what degree are you paying attention to habits for success?
10. To what degree is your family culture supporting the development of Emotional Intelligence?