

International Journal for School-Based Family Counseling

Volume IV, November 2012

Nurturing emotional intelligence through a home-school partnership: Using teacher training as basis for School-Based Family Counseling

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The purpose of this article is to present a literature-based argument that emotional intelligence is a necessary component of human development that increases self-awareness, emotional management and interpersonal relationships. A tendency to give minimal attention to social/emotional needs, and a reactive approach to emotional challenges, has had unwanted consequences. Hope for the future depends on the prioritizing emotional intelligence across home and school, and thus maximize the potential for children to grow up with higher emotional intelligence. Yet, in today's global and fast-paced society, there are great barriers to the development of emotional intelligence. The training of teachers in promoting emotional intelligence in the classroom may provide insight and inspiration for School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC). This paper provides strategies for promoting emotional intelligence through a home-school partnership.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, teacher training, School-Based Family Counseling

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Introduction

The belief that obtaining a good education will lead to financial success has been highly valued in modern societies like the USA. Demonstration of academic success can be measured by standardized tests. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in the USA assesses the success of a school based on test scores. The impact of this NCLB legislation has been studied and the results show that its effectiveness is debatable (Fuller et al, 2007). In many ways American society has functioned as a "meritocracy" in which the best and smartest are rewarded. Upwardly mobile parents invest their time, energy and money in maintaining a high priority on academic success, so that their children get into the best universities - a way of selecting elites (Hayes, 2012). Parents who have the financial means are often driven to make their children

succeed academically, and may enroll a child in enrichment programs every day of the week (Shaw & Woods, 2003).

With such a focus on academic success and materialism over several generations, highly educated adults may be seen to lack emotional intelligence skills. The belief that only the best will survive, called Social Darwinism, is deeply ingrained among some of the highly educated and privileged members of our society (McVea, 2001). These people make decisions and policies that impact on society. Pervasive problems like corporate fraud, Wall Street greed, and the cover-up of deplorable behavior amongst religious leaders, athletes, and politicians have resulted in mistrust of the institutions that are the pillars of our society (Hayes, 2012).

Instead of focusing on academic success to produce smart people, there needs to be a shift towards producing emotionally well and balanced people. Promoting emotional intelligence is vital to the future of our society because it helps create emotional well-being (Tylor, 2001). Those with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems. As children grow up to be adults with higher emotional intelligence, they will have an increased capacity to be empathetic, socially responsible, able to solve problems for the common good, and work effectively with others (Salovey, 2001; BarOn & Parker, 2002).

The emotional well-being of children and adolescents is also the responsibility of the education system. Social-emotional problems are a barrier to learning, and impact on future success (Doll & Cummings, 2008). Systemic changes are needed to support all students through prevention and intervention (Nastasi, 1998). At various levels of schooling, School-Based Family Counselors can work with parents and educators (Carter & Perluss, 2008) to promote emotional intelligence.

Barriers to the development of emotional intelligence

Across cultures, parents are the child's primary teacher. Parenting style is strongly influenced by cultural belief systems and societal norms, and there was a time when parental control and the use of corporal punishment were widely accepted. It is still established in many cultures and subcultures. A domineering and punitive parenting style results in poor social-emotional development (Rao, McHale & Pearson, 2003), in peer rejection (Pearson & Rao, 2003), and in less school effort among the European Americans (Glasgow et al., 1997). In addition, more serious problems can occur as a result of controlling parental practices. They can create insecurity and mistrust due to an unconscious effort to manipulate (Ashner & Meyerson, 1990). Sung (2010) found that controlling and punitive parents tend to have adolescents with greater emotional problems. Children may become passive-aggressive in response to parental control (Belsky, Rha & Park, 2000).

The development of emotional intelligence is optimally fostered in the home environment by parents who take the initiative to give feedback, create opportunities, and maintain reciprocal relationships (Sung, 2010). However, parents are often not able to be attuned to their children's needs when they are focused on their own social, emotional, and economic challenges (Mate, 1999). Major cities in Asia and the West are faced with similar problems, with two parents working, high divorce rates, and single parent homes. These social conditions attract common social problems, made worse by parents who need to delegate their parenting responsibilities to

others, resulting in less parental influence and more peer orientation (Sung, 2008; Luk-Fung, 2011; Leung & Ching, 2011, Neufeld & Mate, 2005).

The ecological perspective

While all people are capable of developing their emotional intelligence, interaction patterns and the socialization process have a variable impact on such development (Sung, 2010). The environment in which the children live has a greater impact on children's emotional well-being than once thought. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) describes a micro-system where children are influenced by feedback and reinforcement from people, both at home and at school. Within this environment children learn through interactions with others, and through the observation of peers, parents and teachers (Jennings & Di, 1996; Bandura, 2002).

The relationship between parent and child, and teacher and student, appears to be a significant trigger. Mate (1999) asserts that when parents are less attuned to their children's emotional needs because of personal problems, external distractions, or just being too busy, children are at greater risk of attention problems and poor emotional intelligence. At school, the relationship between teacher and student not only impacts on children's learning, but also on the development of their emotional intelligence (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Pearce, 2009; Arum, 2011). Until recently, many teachers have been primarily concerned with managing their classrooms and achieving academic goals, and have had to lower their emphasis on meeting students' emotional needs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). This has resulted in the establishment of a certain classroom culture. Teachers' belief systems need to change first as a preliminary to changing classroom culture.

A place for School-Based Family Counseling (SBFC)

The adults involved in the child's life at home and school hold the key to influencing a culture that enhances the development of emotional intelligence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bandura, 2002, Sung, 2010). Given that, SBFC has an important place in the development of such emotional intelligence. Broadly speaking, SBFC can encompass a range of professionals such as school psychologists, counselors, social workers, administrators, and marriage and family therapists who are in a position to work with parents and teachers (Carter & Evans, 2008). It is not enough to work with children to improve their emotional well-being through individual counseling away from their natural environment. In line with SBFC principles, Gutkin (2008) suggests that school psychologists and mental health professionals provide tools to teachers and parents, so that they can work with their children in the environments in which the child functions. Frequently, children's emotional challenges do not occur in isolation, but are directly influenced by the home and school environments. By making changes within and between these environments, SBFC professionals can promote greater sustainability in the development of emotional intelligence. The process involved comprises two stages – parents and teachers helping their children, and SBF Counselors helping parents and teachers do so successfully. In the present study, an applied project is used to illustrate these stages – where a teacher training program provides a basis for examining implications for the role of SBF Counselors.

Teacher training for emotional intelligence in the classroom

Forty elementary school teachers from a public school district in the Southern San Francisco Bay area, with between 5 and 30 years' experience, participated in a project designed to train teachers

in promoting emotional intelligence in the classroom. The project comprised three 3-hour training sessions, based on a research study of the impact of culture on emotional intelligence (Sung, 2010). An initial, pre-training survey revealed a range of challenges that teachers faced with students around emotional issues. While the severity level varied, many reported being challenged by their students' behavioral and emotional issues which disrupted learning and had a negative impact on the classroom climate. Such behaviors included: short attention span, thinks only of self, lacks empathy, has little patience, doesn't know how to solve problems, can't seem to work together, gets stuck when faced with disappointments, lacks independence, bullies, engages in peer conflicts, gets upset when learning something new, withdraws, lacks respect, is immature, needs attention, lacks joy, has poor self-esteem, blames, bickers, tattles, does not take perspectives, and shows poor motivation. The surveyed teachers believed that emotional intelligence should be infused in the classroom because knowledge alone is not enough as preparation for adolescence and adulthood. Teachers were also asked why they thought that emotional intelligence would be important in the classroom. They suggested that a focus on emotional intelligence would help students demonstrate the knowledge they have learned. It would allow teachers to know their students better. They said that it could foster a better learning environment, a positive attitude towards learning, a better understanding of self, better conflict management, the promotion of lifelong learning, and help with development of the whole child.

The first of the three training sessions began with background information on emotional intelligence, definitions, theoretical foundations, and the neuroscience that pinpoints emotional brain functions. Teachers discussed how their beliefs, values and priorities influenced classroom culture and interaction patterns – in the same way as parents did at home (Sung, 2010).

The second part of the training program emphasized the indirect promotion of emotional intelligence by creating a classroom culture that reinforces pertinent skills. Some teachers were worried that they did not have time to add to their busy schedules. However, it was pointed out that, intentionally or unintentionally, they already possessed attitudes and values that reinforced certain behaviors; that they were already modeling and paying attention to certain classroom priorities. So why not create a culture by paying attention to skills that promote emotional intelligence? The majority of students were likely to benefit from a renewed focus on interaction patterns, and the reinforcement of values that encourage emotional intelligence development. It involves a classroom that is solution focused, emphasizes collaboration rather than competition, uses respectful language, and makes the connection between thinking, feeling and behaving. It involves encouraging students to practice these skills daily. When teachers pay attention to pro-social behaviors, flexible thinking, cooperation, handling setbacks or frustrations, taking responsibility, being independent, standing up for justice, stopping bullying and hurtful behaviors, and perspective taking or empathy, students learn that these skills are important. Specific exercises to give feedback, reinforce, and attend to specific behaviors were introduced to give teachers confidence.

Typical unhelpful teacher-student interactions observed in the classroom were described: teachers as the giver of information and students as the receiver; teachers who direct and manage the classroom while the students are expected to listen and follow direction; the teacher who stops a lesson to remind students to pay attention, waiting for a student to be ready before instruction, or reprimanding a student publicly about a repeated offense or noncompliance.

These reactions were compared with proactive teacher-student interactions. An example was given, where a kindergarten boy drew negative attention to himself by putting his arms through an elastic waist shorts during transition from one activity to another. Some students gathered around him, but the teacher began to sing with hand motions as she drew students to her. All the students gathered around the teacher, leaving the boy standing alone in the back of the room. He was not getting the attention he was seeking. He decided to join the group but always wanted to sit in the front. His teacher had a spot saved for him so he did not have to push other students to squeeze in. The teacher continued with her story without giving the boy any attention but when he raised his hand to participate, he was the first to be called. He was reinforced for joining the class instead of doing the wrong thing. What could have been a negative interaction was changed to a positive one.

The third part of the training program focused on direct coaching of specific skills when needed in teachable moments. Some students might need direct coaching because they came from a dysfunctional or chaotic home environment that stifled the development of emotional intelligence. Skills such as problem solving, making choices, communication and empathy were selected for exercise. The thinking process was visually represented in a worksheet format (Sung, in press). Teachers discussed scenarios they faced and shared with each other.

The post-training survey indicated changes in teachers' belief systems. Many teachers reported that they could infuse emotional intelligence into their classrooms naturally. Some teachers said that their understanding of emotional intelligence had deepened and that they would get to know their students better. Others said that the information confirmed what they believed, and that they would try to implement the program because it was what they felt was important. All appreciated the stories they had heard about the classroom climate that worked and did not work to support emotional intelligence. Many appreciated the visual handouts they could use.

Implications for School-Based Family Counselors

The SBF Counselor can address the child's social and emotional needs across both settings. Such counselors serve as a bridge between home and school as they have knowledge about both the school system and parenting practices. Assessment of both home and classroom cultures through interviews or surveys with parents and teachers gives the SBF Counselor an understanding of environmental influences – including the culture across home and school regarding expectations, boundaries, emotional expression, interaction style and priorities as they impact on the child's socialization and emotional learning. The use of a universal screener may be appropriate as a foundation for intervention before emotional issues become more significant problems (Doll & Commings, 2008). The above teacher training program highlights the kind of information that the SBF Counsellor could look for.

The teacher training program also highlights how consultation by the SBF Counselor with teachers will allow for the promotion of emotional intelligence through creating a culture within the classroom that sets high priority on the emotional needs of students (Pasi, 2001). Topics like empathy, integrity, solution training, listening skills, anticipating success, persistence, exerting effort, and connection between thinking, feeling, and behaving can be a routine discussion in the classroom (Shapiro, 1997; Vernon, 1989). The SBF Counselor can encourage the teacher to use teachable moments to reinforce emotional intelligence skills such as assertiveness, self-

awareness, helpfulness, collaboration, and problem solving. The classroom is an ideal setting for children to practice such social skills. Interpersonal challenges often result from poor communication and inaccurate perceptions. The SBF Counselor can encourage teachers to identify communication challenges and help students to use constructive thinking in solving problems.

At home, a child's emotional development can be limited by parents who are not able to model and communicate with their children effectively. The SBF Counselor can provide the strategies and structure needed at home to support the development of emotional intelligence. A combination of psychodynamic techniques to raise self-awareness, humanistic approaches to maximize potential and maintain positive self-regard, cognitive-behavioral methods to manage behaviors and emotions, and a rational-emotive mindset to focus on solutions and enhance optimism, can address various aspects of emotional intelligence. Use of an eclectic model can produce the best outcome, because several branches of psychology have contributed to the foundation of the concept of emotional intelligence (Sung, 2008). SBFC with the parents can empower them to reinforce pro-social behaviors, and to model flexibility and collaboration. The SBF Counselor can recommend experiences that promote emotional intelligence within a specific family's resources. Experiential learning can create opportunities within the environment to help make new neurological connections in the brain, leading to higher emotional intelligence (LeDoux 1996). While there are many programs that claim to increase emotional intelligence, research and theory suggest that the relationships between parent and child, teacher and student, and peer and peer form the basis for the development of emotional intelligence. As the adults in a child's life model, reinforce and pay attention to pro-social behavior, that child will practice such behavior with its peers.

The SBF Counselor can help both parents and teachers think of ways to give children the opportunity to be aware of their actions, choices and emotions; and to make connections between thinking, feeling, and behaving (Shapiro, 1997; Lewkowicz 1999; Pasi, 2001). Adolescents with parents who listen, respect their opinions, contribute to others, have high expectations, and have a social network with family and friends, will have higher emotional intelligence (Sung, 2010). Aspects of emotional intelligence can be taught directly. SBF Counselors can gauge the child's social competence in terms of self-management, assertiveness, cooperation, independence, and the ability to maintain mutually beneficial and satisfying relationships. Instead of waiting for the problems in such areas to become severe, weaker skills can be developed by alerting adults in the child's environment. Within a collaborative model, the SBF Counselor, parents and teachers can work together to prevent the development of more severe problems (Doll & Cummings, 2008). SBF Counselors can help parents and teachers identify faulty assumptions used by the child when solving problems (Vernon, 1989). The counselor can then help the parents or teacher coach the child to understand and change such faulty assumptions, and rework problem solving strategies. Counselor and parents or teachers can also guide the child to create a constructive scene that is based on accurate assumptions (Lewkowicz, 1999).

In addition, SBF Counselors can offer guidance to parents and teachers on collaborative discipline. Children can participate in setting rules and consequences. Their sense of control increases their ownership of their behavior and the choices they make. In order to maintain expected behaviors and attitudes, recognizing the children's efforts is reinforcing. Consistency

and follow up help children feel secure and see the connection between cause and effect in their behavior (Shapiro, 1997; Borba, 2009). Parents and teachers can teach by example, and model living out the values they want their children to embrace. Children need to see and hear how adults solve problems. SBF Counselors can guide parents and teachers to model problem solving without argument, having respect for others in social situations, and making connections between thinking, feeling and behaving (Vernon, 1989). Raising awareness of how to use teachable moments at home and school is something a SBF Counselor can also do. However, more intensive support may be necessary for parents or teachers, and the SBF Counselor may then need to provide more intensive and individualized support (Doll & Cummings, 2008).

SBF Counselors can work actively with both parents and teachers to nurture the development of emotional intelligence through fostering partnerships between home and school. The school can take the initiative by including parents in interventions, consultations, and counseling (Carter & Evans, 2008; Doll & Cummings, 2008). Such a project can start with teachers being trained in promoting emotional intelligence, as demonstrated in the above-mentioned training program. The interaction patterns between teacher and student impact on the neurological connections in the brain. Teachers can infuse emotional intelligence in the curriculum, reinforce pro-social behaviors, reinforce emotional regulation, and model problem solving (Pasi, 2001). From the school side, a range of additional professionals come into play. The school's principal can take the initiative and intervene when parent consultation is needed. The principal can inform parents about collaborative discipline, providing structure at home, and communicating high expectations for both academic and social/emotional success. The school counselor may be available to meet with students for more personalized support. They could talk about individual needs and looking at the bigger picture. The school psychologist could work with parents on developing specific strategies to promote emotional intelligence. They can raise self-awareness, discuss the impact of self on others, think of options and choose the best solution. Beyond involving a SBF Counselor, schools can refer to community agencies to support families who experience ongoing struggles and who are in need of more intensive support. Resources for parents and students may need to be found for different level of needs, and handled by various experts in the field (Gerrard, 2008). However, it should be noted that collaboration and training in such collaboration across disciplines is limited, and the Interdisciplinary Collaboration study indicates that more cross-disciplinary training at graduate level is necessary for SBF Counselors and allied professionals if they are to be effective as a change agents (Deloach et al., 2012).

Conclusions

The capacity for emotional intelligence is available to all people from an early age, but the level of its development depends on environmental influences and interaction patterns in the child's social systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sung 2010). The community's values, beliefs and priorities influence people's actions and interactions, for better or worse (Bandura, 2000). For example, the consequences of "meritocracy" are evident in countries like the USA (Hayes, 2012). By contrast, when emotional intelligence is developed at home and at school, children grow up with empathy, the ability to contribute to others, emotional awareness of self and others, effective communication, and constructive problem solving skills. Parents and teachers hold the key to creating an environment within which such learning can take place (Lewkowicz, 1999; Pasi, 2001). Their ability to fulfill that crucial role depends to some degree on the nature of guidance from helping professionals who understand the nature of emotional intelligence, have

the skills to support and train parents and teachers, and can work in a coordinated manner across family and school systems. SBF Counselors are among the few helping professionals who are in a position to tackle this challenge. The present article has sought to provide both a framework and some specific guidelines for how the SBF Counselor can approach this immensely valuable community role.

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