Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom: A Student Wellness Learning Community

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Developmental educators are often familiar with the benefits of learning communities and with the importance of incorporating research-based best practices into their developmental studies courses. Faculty may be less familiar with the educational applications based on the concepts of emotional intelligence (EI). Faculty at College of the Mainland created a learning community for incoming developmental freshman that incorporated the concepts of EI from the work of Golman along with principles from Chickering's (1991) Seven Principles of Good Practice and Boylan's (2002) What Works: A Guide to Research-Based Best Practices in Developmental Education. Faculty found that the EI strategies provided a common language and a useful framework for planning instructional materials and activities.

In February 2005, faculty from the Academic Success Department (ASD) at College of the Mainland (COM) attended a conference (Low & Nelson) where they learned about the use of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the classroom. This experience inspired them to design a learning community that would incorporate the principles of EI into some of their developmental studies and credit courses.

College of the Mainland is a community college located in Texas City, Texas, with a fluctuating attendance of 2,500 to 5,000, depending on the semester. Given the diverse nature of the student population—approximately 57% Caucasian, 17% African American, 20% Hispanic and 3% other (Friedrich, 2007)—and the large number of students testing into developmental courses, developmental faculty believed that EI principles and strategies would fit with their curricula and help to address the academic and personal needs of their developmental students.

COM's Academic Success Department includes three remedial subject areas: reading, which has three levels; writing, three levels; and mathematics, four. For this learning community, faculty elected to link three courses using the theme of student wellness: Psychology for Success, a developmental and college-level course focused on EI concepts, study skills, problem solving, career decisions, goal setting, and personal awareness; Writing Improvement 0360, the second in the three-level sequence, a course which involved the basic writing and grammar skills needed for academic coursework and workforce certifications; and Introduction to Physical Education, which was a college-level orientation class on personal health and physical education. Faculty wanted students who were new, incoming developmental freshmen with no prior college-level academic or social experiences. The sole placement criteria was the need for Writing Improvement 0360. Instructors wanted learning community students to encounter what Tinto (1987, p. 602) described as "learning as a shared rather than isolated experience" and, as Boylan (2002, p. 67) suggested, to "work collaboratively in small groups or teams to solve problems, study, or develop class projects and benefit by having larger blocks of time for sustained discussions and activities."

In planning the Student Wellness Learning Community (SWLC), faculty drew from three sources. First, they aligned the goals and objectives for the SWLC with Chickering's (1991) Seven Principles of Good Practice:

Chickering's Principles

1. Encourage contact between students and faculty.
2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.
3. Encourage active learning.
4. Give prompt feedback.
5. Emphasize time on task.
6. Communicate high expectations.
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

SWLC Goals

1. Increase attendance.
2. Increase retention.
3. Increase pass rates.

SWLC Objectives

1. Recognize and enhance learning styles.
2. Develop emotional intelligence skills.
3. Increase basic skills, such as writing and research, health and nutrition, and intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships needed for success in college and in life.

Second, in planning instructional activities they followed guidelines outlined in Boylan's (2002) What Works: A Guide to Research-Based Best Practices in Developmental Education. Boylan identified several important practices including the use of varied instructional methods, frequent and timely feedback to students, mastery learning, developmental course content that is linked to college-level requirements, shared instructional strategies, critical thinking instruction, active-learning techniques, and the use of classroom assessments as defined in Classroom Assessment Techniques (Angelo & Cross, 1993). SWLC instructors focused on creating safe classroom settings, used mastery learning techniques such as expert groups to teach concepts, linked content across their disciplines, focused on critical thinking through the use of real-life scenarios, created active-learning opportunities (Bonham, 2006), and used a variety of classroom assessment techniques.

Third, by incorporating the concepts of EI into the classroom, faculty believed that they could provide students with additional strategies for achieving academic success through using Emotional Intelligence, which is defined as:

> the capacity to reason about emotions, and use emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004, p. 197).

According to Daniel Goleman, EI expert and author, the EI concept is being used through social and emotional learning (SEL) programs in "tens of thousands of schools worldwide" (Goleman, 2010, p. 6), and "in the U.S. many districts and even entire states currently make SEL a curriculum requirement, mandating that just as students must attain a certain level of competence in mathematics and language, so too should they master these essential skills of living."

Used as the core of the SWLC curriculum was Low and Nelson's Emotional Intelligence (2003) textbook which introduced

five "beliefs about emotional intelligence and achievement":

1. Emotional intelligence is the single most important influencing variable in personal achievement, career success, leadership, and life satisfaction.
2. Emotional intelligence is a learned ability requiring a systematic experience-based approach to learning.
3. Schools and colleges do not provide a practical and systematic model to learn emotional intelligence.
4. Learning emotional knowledge and skills requires an intentional, active learner-centered approach involving self-directed coaching, mentoring, and visualization.
5. Emotional intelligence consists of specific skills, behaviors, and attitudes that can be learned, applied, and modeled by students to improve personal satisfaction, achievement, and career effectiveness. (Low and Nelson, 2003, p. xiii)

Further information by Daniel Goleman (2010) concluded that "Now the case can be made scientifically: helping children improve their self-awareness and confidence, manage their disturbing emotions and impulses, and increase their empathy pays off not just in improved behavior but in measurable academic achievement".

Under Low and Nelson's EI model, there were four "competency areas with related skills" for personal development (2003, p. xv-xvii):

Interpersonal Skills:

- Assertion—ability to clearly and honestly communicate personal thoughts and feelings to another person in a comfortable, direct, appropriate, and straightforward manner
- Aggression—a potential problem area that negatively affects relationships; involves anger emotion that must be understood and converted…
- Deference—results in ineffective communications that negatively affect relationship; involves fear emotion that must be understood and converted…

Leadership Skills:

- Social Awareness—ability to choose the appropriate emotional, social, and physical distance during verbal and nonverbal interactions with others; to impact and influence others in positive ways.
- Empathy—ability to accurately understand and constructively respond to the expressed feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and needs of others.
- Decision Making—ability to plan, formulate, initiate, and implement effective problem-solving or conflict-resolution procedures to resolve personal problems and to use a skills approach when making decisions
- Positive Influence—ability to positively impact, persuade, and influence others and make a positive difference

Self-Management Skills

- Drive Strength—ability to effectively direct personal energy and motivation to achieve personal, career, and life goals
- Commitment Ethic—ability to complete tasks, projects, assignments, and personal responsibilities in a dependable and successful manner, even under difficult circumstances
- Time Management—ability to organize tasks into a personally productive time schedule and use time effectively to complete tasks
- Change Orientation—degree to which an individual is or is not satisfied and the magnitude of change necessary or desired to develop personal and professional effectiveness

Intrapersonal Skills

- Self-Esteem—ability to view Self as positive, competent, and successful
- Stress Management—ability to choose and exercise healthy self-control and self-management in response to stressful events

Although each course within the SWLC was taught by a different instructor, the instructors coordinated assignments so that the content of the three courses was linked using EI

concepts and terminologies tied to active-learning strategies. Writing Improvement assignments reflected the EI concepts concerned with the Self which were covered in the Psychology for Success course, and Physical Education included EI instruction by addressing the physical well-being of the student. EI terminology and concepts were introduced to students on the first day of classes. For example, instructors explained their course syllabi as contracts between professors and students. Then instructors reviewed goals, outcomes, and expectations for academic and personal successes along with the sequence of developmental classes students would follow. The EI concepts used in the team-building activities during the first week of instruction included interpersonal, intrapersonal, self-management, and leadership skills.

A first-day activity in Writing Improvement had students completing BINGO sheets with statements reflecting personal information such as "find someone who lives in the same town/city as you," "find someone who is taking a math class," or "find someone who enjoys the same hobby as you." Each square asked for contact information so students could build contact sheets in case of future questions or missed assignments. This activity reinforced leadership skills and interpersonal skills under the EI concepts.

All students took a learning styles assessment test the first day of class in Writing Improvement, and, in each of the three learning community courses, instructors presented tips for classroom success associated with various learning styles, such as auditory, kinesthetic, or visual (Hammett, 2006, pp. 6-7). Students shared their learning styles in small group settings which emphasized interpersonal and leadership skills. Then students discussed strategies they would use to help them learn class materials, an activity that encourages the use of self-management skills.

Throughout the course as each of the four competency areas were covered in Psychology for Success, the students took self-assessment quizzes located in Low and Nelson's Emotional Intelligence (S. Henderson, personal communication, March, 19, 2009). These assessments followed the Emotional Learning System

based on the difference between "emotional and experience-based learning that is different from traditional academic content learning" (Low & Nelson, 2003, p. xv):

> The system was designed to ensure a learner-centered development process built on honest positive self-assessment. The five steps were as follows:
>
> > Step A (Self-Assessment: Explore) requires that you develop an intentional self-assessment habit: inquiring, discovering, and questioning.
> >
> > Step B (Self-Awareness: Identify) involves the process of identifying your experience as either a thought or a feeling.
> >
> > Step C (Self-Knowledge: Understand) involves "insight" and an understanding that allows you to make choices about how to behave.
> >
> > Step D (Self-Development: Learn) involves learning various ways to improve your behavior.
> >
> > Step E (Self-Improvement: Apply and Model) requires that you apply and model emotionally intelligent behavior to achieve personal, career, and academic goals. (Low and Nelson, 2003, p. xv)

The "Self-Assessment" quizzes listed statements that students applied to their own lives. In response to the statements, students circled one of three answers: M for Most Often, S for Sometimes, or L for Least Often; the answers were worth points: M = 2, S = 1, L = 0 (Low & Nelson, 2003, p. 37). Students added up the points based on their answers and then transferred their scores to an extended profile where they determined if they were within a low, normal, or high range for each of the four competency areas. Before students exited the course, re-assessments were taken to determine if their emotional intelligence awareness and skills had increased or decreased.

To help instructors introduce themselves to students, a Road of Life Map from Hammett's Developmental Writing Workshop was used. Students then began their own Road of Life Maps assignment in Psychology for Success by choosing and illustrating events that represented the high points and low points of their lives (Hammett, 2006, p. 61). In small groups, students shared their maps and became aware of others' cultures, their accomplishments, and other important life events. This activity reinforced social awareness and empathy under the concept of leadership skills. It also helped to build a safe community of writers within the writing classroom.

Students were encouraged to make connections between the three classes through instructors' mentoring, collaboration, and use of EI terminology. The students used EI vocabulary to relate their accomplishments and their concerns regarding their college experiences with each of the instructors. As one SWLC student, Trace, shared from the Psychology for Success course evaluation, "This class should be required of all students to take. I came out of this class more goal-oriented and no longer have self-esteem issues. I learned the importance of having goals and how to deal with the obstacles that come in the way." The constant communication among the instructors reinforced assignments and attendance, and encouraged students to work for academic and personal successes. Fabiola, another SWLC student, commented in course evaluations, "In this class I learned a lot of new things about situations in life. I learned how to manage my time and how to make good grades."

In the Writing Improvement class, writings correlated to the Psychology for Success activities through compare and contrast writings. In pairs, students discussed and wrote a collaborative essay about their similarities and differences; any topic could be used such as hobbies, travels, or physical characteristics. The in-class assignment helped with relationship building, reinforcement of writing skills and processes, and understanding of EI terminologies and concepts. Many students noted that the paired writing assignment was more difficult than individual essays, citing the challenge of employing the EI self-management skills of time management, commitment ethic, and the abilities to complete

tasks.

The Psychology for Success class used hands-on activities, role playing scenarios, and YouTube and DVD movie clips to enhance students' understandings of the EI concepts (S. Henderson, personal communication, March 19, 2009). At the end of the semester, students watched the video, Coach Carter (Robbins, Scanlon, Gale, Tollin, & Morales, 2005) about a coach who inspired a group of unruly boys to be successful on and off the basketball court. Then students discussed and wrote about emotional changes in the movie's characters which helped them apply the four competency areas of EI to everyday life. Noting this connection in her own life, Nayely said, "This is a really helpful class because the skills helped me think before I act" (College of the Mainland Marketing, 2008).

In addition, the use of an EI planner with correlated EI activities reinforced the skills listed under the four competency areas. For example, students used an illustration of an empty clock face to log their daily activities and then discussed with the whole group where their time was being spent. Discovering how time was being spent, whether wasted or productive, was enlightening to many. The planner contained activities such as blank calendars for students to complete with class information, academic checklists for scoring student behaviors, and personal and academic successes, hints, and tips (C. Moran, personal communication, August 28, 2008). Krystal, an SWLC student, explained how she was learning to use some of these strategies:

> "The most important skill I learned in this class (SWLC) is how to be a better person in general. I have learned to deal with my problems in an effective way. I can schedule my day the way I want and not let time run my life, and most important, I have figured out what I want to do in the future." (College of the Mainland Marketing, 2008)

The Physical Education instructor focused on using the EI terminology to enhance students' well-being. For the walk/run course, the instructor developed a map showing distances from COM to other cities. Students set goals and then met their goals by walking or running the distances until they reached their

destinations; this reinforced drive strength and commitment throughout the course (A. Bass, personal communication, February 9, 2008). The students also kept food journals, which provided practice with basic writing skills, and calculated their calorie intakes versus calories burned through class activities. Under the instructor's supervision, students' physical measurements were taken at the beginning of the semester and then compared with those taken at the end of the semester. Communication between students and the instructor was crucial for personal improvements to occur. Decision making, time management, stress management, and self-esteem were addressed throughout the Physical Education class (A. Bass, personal communication, February 9, 2008).

SWLC Issues and Changes

SWLC instructors encountered several problems not related to instruction. The first involved marketing. "Getting the word out" proved to be harder than anticipated. The instructors placed advertisements in student catalogues, hung posters in various campus buildings, made visits to Advisement, and informed counselors. Second, in spite of the requirement that students be enrolled in all three SWLC courses, a number of students were consistently enrolled in only one or two of the three, and scheduling remained a problem that was never adequately resolved. A third challenge for SWLC instructors was finding the best order for the blocked courses. In the end, the best option scheduled classes from 8:00 a.m. to 12:20 p.m., starting with Psychology for Success, followed by Writing Improvement, and ending with Physical Education. This set-up pleased the students since they did not have to re-dress for classes after physical work-outs.

There were a number of positive changes made from semester to semester. One was revising the curriculum of the Physical Education class from a textbook-based course to a walk/run class with individual goals set by students. This change allowed students to leave the classroom environment for field trips to local walking/jogging trails, and some of the students competed in a community marathon (A. Bass, personal communication, February 9, 2008). As the students discovered, using EI in their personal lives equaled success. "This class has really helped me find myself

and know where I stand in life. Now I value myself," said Victor, an SWLC student (College of the Mainland Marketing, 2008).

The second positive change instructors made was the use of class time for tutoring and instructor help. In a study completed by the Academic Success Department internal researcher in December of 2006, data showed that tutored students withdrew from classes at significantly lower rates than non-tutored students (Elliott, 2006). Of the students who received tutoring for developmental courses at COM, 73% passed those courses with a grade of A, B, or C compared to a 55.4% pass rate for those not receiving tutoring (Elliott, 2006). Given this information, the writing instructor used class time to take students to the computer laboratory to sign up for extra out-of-class tutoring, to use the professional tutoring services, and to receive one-on-one instructor help.

Outcomes: Data

Faculty identified three overall goals for the EI learning community—to increase attendance, retention, and pass rates for this group compared to the rates for developmental students not in the SWLC. While the number of students enrolled within COM's learning community setting was low—the largest group was seventeen—data show some success in meeting these goals. Although no formal data were gathered for attendance purposes, the learning community instructors noticed that peers used a variety of techniques to encourage classmates to attend classes. Students would send instant messages or texts and call peers who were late or absent for classes. Students attended regularly throughout the learning community courses and were very supportive of one another.

Faculty also wanted to impact retention. Fall to spring retention for this group of students was good: fall 2005 to spring 2006—100%; fall 2006 to spring 2007—83.3% (Friedrich, 2010). Retention rates for developmental students as a whole for these same time periods were 64% and 67% (Elliott, 2009). However, because enrollments for the SWLC sections were small, these rates cannot be appropriately compared, nor can conclusions be drawn about the effect of the learning community on retention, especially since spring to fall retention rates for the SWLC were only three

percentage points higher than the rates for other developmental students. EI faculty had hoped that over time, with more learning communities, additional retention data could have been collected.

Faculty had also wanted to increase pass rates. As shown in Table 1, grade distributions for students in the SWLC sections of PHED 1107 for fall 2005, spring 2006, and fall 2006 were similar to those for the students in other sections with approximately the same percentage of students earning a grade of ABC across all semesters in all sections. A higher percentage of SWLC students earned a grade of D or F; however, because of the small number of SWLC students each semester, these percentages cannot be appropriately compared. The grade distributions for the PSYC 2312 were also similar across all sections, although no grades of D or F were awarded to SWLC students.

Faculty were especially interested in improving pass rates for English 0360. As shown in Table 2, data for this class did show that after the first semester, there were differences in the success rates between the SWLC sections and the non-LC sections. These differences can be seen in three ways: the percentage of students earning A, B, or C grades; the percentage of students earning a D or F; and the percentage of students who withdrew. In addition, the percentage of students who received an R, or Repeat, grade was also lower for these final two semesters of SWLC students. Again, because of the small numbers, statistical comparisons cannot appropriately be made, but the differences are notable: 82.3% of the SWLC students earned a grade of A, B, or C whereas 46.6% of the non-learning community students earned a grade of A, B, or C in spring 2006. In fall 2006, the percentages were 77.1% to 55.6%. If this pattern had continued and aggregate data collected over two or three more semesters, appropriate statistical comparisons might have been possible.

However, it should also be noted that at College of the Mainland, some sections of ENGL 0360 are multi-level classes with ENGL 0330 students enrolled in the same sections. This would not have been true for the SWLC sections, another confounding factor in any effort to make grade comparisons. Nonetheless, these results were encouraging to instructors since raising pass rates for ENGL 0360 students was one of their goals.

Table 1

Grade Comparisons of Learning Community and Non-Learning Community Students in PHED 1107

Grade	Fall '05 SWLC	Fall '05 Non-LC	Spring '06 SWLC	Spring '06 Non-LC	Fall '06 SWLC	Fall '06 Non-LC
ABC	64.7 (11)	70.6 (205)	70.5 (12)	74.2 (208)	72.2 (13)	72.7 (184)
DF	29.4 (5)	2.7 (8)	0	2.1 (6)	11.1 (2)	1.9 (5)
I	5.8 (1)	2.0 (6)	0	1.7 (5)	0	.79 (2)
W	0	24.4 (71)	29.4 (5)	21.7 (61)	16.6 (3)	24.5 (62)

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate the total N for the group. Other numbers are percentages.A grade of I is a temporary grade indicating that, in the instructor's judgment, the student can complete the course objectives within a specified extension of time. A grade of W represents Withdrawal on or before the date as specified in the college calendar.

Table 2

Grade Comparisons of Learning Community and Non-Learning Community Students in ENGL 0360

Grade	Fall '05 SWLC	Fall '05 Non-LC	Spring '06 SWLC	Spring '06 Non-LC	Fall '06 SWLC	Fall '06 Non-LC
ABC	47.0 (8)	43.6 (48)	82.3 (14)	46.6 (55)	77.1 (14)	55.6 (108)
DF	11.7 (2)	30.9 (34)	0	11.0 (13)	11.1 (2)	15.9 (31)
I	0	0	0	0	0	0
W	0	9.0 (10)	11.7 (2)	29.6 (35)	5.5 (1)	20.6 (40)
R	41.7 (7)	15.49 (17)	5.89 (1)	11.0 (13)	5.5 (1)	7.2 (14)

Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate the total N for the group. Other numbers are percentages. A grade of I is a temporary grade indicating that, in the instructor's judgment, the student can complete the course objectives within a specified extension of time. A grade of W represents Withdrawal on or before the date as specified in the college calendar. A grade of R shows the need to re-enroll in individualized study class or repeat the course; student made progress but did not meet course objectives.

Where Are We Now?

Many of the students involved in the Student Wellness Learning Community continue to keep in touch with the SWLC instructors and with one another, and they are still enrolled

in classes at COM; some will have graduated by Spring 2010. Although each cohort group spent only one semester in the learning community, those enrolled in the SWLC classes made connections between managing their emotional intelligence and their personal and academic successes. Even though quantitative data were unimpressive, the personal remarks from students and the mentoring that continues between instructors and the SWLC students have been encouraging to the SWLC instructors. "It was like a family… and when the classes were over, it was like my family had broken up…I miss it!" exclaimed Jarrod, an SWLC student (COM Marketing, 2008).

While studies have shown that the learning community structure itself (Tinto, 1987) and the best practices (Boylan, 2002) which faculty incorporated into the SWLC could be expected to have a positive impact on student retention and academic performance, faculty found that the EI strategies provided a common language and an additional framework for planning instructional materials and activities. Although the SWLC no longer exists at COM, SWLC instructors continue to use EI in their courses, encouraging students to document important dates, practice leadership skills, and employ the EI self-management skills of commitment ethic, communicating effectively, and planning for and completing tasks.

Based on the personal reports of their SWLC students, College of the Mainland SWLC faculty believe that incorporating these EI skills into the curriculum was well worth the effort. For more information on the Student Wellness Learning Community, emotional intelligence classroom activities and implementation, or to review students' project samples, please contact Beth Hammett.

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