Using Emotional Intelligence as a Basis for Developing an Online Faculty Guide for Emotional Awareness

Jodi McKnight

Online learning is integrated into nearly every type of college, university or workplace. It is more difficult for online instructors to assess the social-emotional components of learning due to a lack of face-to-face interaction. The following concept paper explores the emotional awareness levels of faculty teaching online courses and discusses its implications for the future of online education.

Almost every type of college, university and workplace, incorporates online learning into training, education and day-to-day business (Browning, 2010). Whether it is an online university course or a continuing education credit, the ability to further one's skills and knowledge can be done remotely with the click of mouse. With the rise in online learning opportunities, faculty members face a new set of challenges when it comes to demonstrating their own emotions and interpreting student's emotions. Venu (2006) reports that emotional responses influence the learning situation; likewise, Lawson (n.d.) believes that emotions can disrupt the learning and thinking process. Despite limited research on the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) in the online classroom, it is vital to examine both faculty and students emotional awareness in an online environment.

Emotions play an important role in learning. Sylwester (1994) concludes that "emotion is important to education-it drives attention, which in turns drives learning and memory" (p. 60). This may be more important in the online learning environment because there are a variety of unexplored and unidentified emotions taking place, all of which are happening without the physical presence of an instructor to be able to detect and respond accordingly. Venu (2006) posits that effective face-to-face teachers have always been aware that there is an incredible link between emotions and the learning process, but there is limited research on the link between emotions and the learning process for online instructors and students. This link of awareness, or emotional intelligence (EI), refers to the ability to recognize emotions and then regulating them within ourselves and others (Nooraei & Arasi, 2011).

When it comes to the EI of online instructors, Coghlan (2001) says that assumptions should not be made that faculty members will automatically be aware of how to act or communicate online. Instructors do not receive formal training on the interpersonal components of online education. Faculty, who begin a career in an online environment are trained in a variety of ways (Browning, 2010). In many cases, faculty will have to participate in some form of orientation or training program, as part of their hiring process. However, most of this training focuses on academic issues such as pedagogy, plagiarism or how to facilitate an asynchronous discussion (Browning, 2010). In addition, there may be training on university policies and procedures, but rarely is there a guide for online faculty on how to handle emotional situations, how to interpret a student's emotions within the course room, or even to be aware of their own levels of EI. The purpose of this current study examines the perceived emotional awareness of online faculty, how they interpret the emotions of students, their response styles and the development of appropriate methods to define and identify best practices.

METHODS

An online faculty emotional awareness survey was created (see Appendix A) and distributed to 100 individuals who facilitated courses for two private universities. A convenience sample was used because the subjects were selected from universities in which the researcher had access. Emails were sent to administration of the universities requesting permission to sample all faculty members. The survey was created in order to explore the perceptions of an online faculty member's own emotional awareness, and the emotional awareness of their online students. Both of the universities offer traditional face-to-face courses, as well as online and blended courses and rely heavily on adjunct faculty to teach a majority of their online courses. Both universities offer traditional, non-traditional, and online courses. Traditional courses can be defined as courses offered Monday through Friday, during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. Students who take traditional courses are typically between the ages of 18 and 25. Non-traditional courses are those courses offered in a non-traditional format. These can include night classes, classes that meet one-time per week at night, or weekend-format classes. Students that typically take these courses are adults between the ages of 25-65, who are considered "working adults" and cannot take courses during daytime hours due to employment. Online courses are defined as courses offered in an online format only.

Participants

Requests were then sent to the faculty members of the universities; specifically those who had or were teaching online classes and have offer both traditional and non-traditional courses. Online faculty received an email requesting their participation in completing a survey regarding faculty and students' emotional awareness, as well as a qualitative component asking for feedback on online education. A total of one-hundred faculty received the survey, while fifty-two faculty completed the survey (*N*=52).

The faculty that completed the survey had a wide range of years of experience teaching online courses. The years of experience ranged from less than 1 year to 10 plus years. Thirty-two percent of the faculty reported having 1-3 years' experience; 28% having 4-6 years' experience, 22% having 7-9 years' experience, and 14% having less than 1 year.

Only 4% of the faculty had 10 or over years of experience. The online faculty associated themselves with different types of educational institutions, such as private 4-year institution, public 4-year institution, community college, online university, or faith-based university. Fifty-four percent of the faculty that completed the survey reported they worked for a private 4-year university, whereas only 28% said they worked for an online university. In the recruitment phase, faculty who had taught both traditional and non-traditional students was targeted. The faculty that was surveyed reported teaching both traditional and non-traditional students at some point within their careers. Table 1 provides information regarding faculty experience by discipline.

Materials

A survey was created by the researcher because a review of literature did not produce an effective method of examining emotional awareness for online instructors. The survey was based on a review of comments from a variety of online faculty members and students already participating in an online classroom. Table 2 describes examples of questions asked on the survey. The survey is provided in Appendix A.

Procedures

The survey was then distributed via an internet survey company to the two universities. As the data was collected, the internet survey company comprised a report to provide information of the surveys. The secure website offered by the internet survey company ensured security and privacy for members. Once the data was printed from the website, it was secured in a locked, fire-proof filing cabinet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The format for online classes and instruction can be very different compared to a traditional face-to-face environment. In a traditional class, students can display their emotions in a variety of ways, such as facial expressions, nonverbal cues, and even verbally making their feelings known. In an online class, students display their emotions quite differently. They do so via written phases, comments, or emoticons. The instructor's response style is also different, depending in which type of class being taught. Therefore, some theoretical generalizations

Table 1: Faculty Discipline

Type of Discipline	Percentage
Business (Marketing, Management, Economics)	26.0
Psychology	20.0
English (Composition I, II, Literature)	13.0
Student Success (Career Management, Remedial Skills	13.0
Christian Studies (Pastoral Ministry, New Testament, Missions)	9.0
History	4.0
Science (Biology, Physical Science)	4.0
Humanities (Philosophy, Theatre, Music)	4.0
Health Education	2.0
Math	2.0

Table 2: Example Questions on Faculty Survey

1. When teaching an online course, which types of emotional qualities do your students experience?
2. In what ways do you respond to your online students' emotional needs?
3. What kind of training do you feel would benefit you as it relates to identifying online student emotions?
4. How do online students express their emotions within the online course room?

can be made, whereas in a face-to-face class, the instructor may respond with physical gestures, non-verbal cues and voicing their concerns in an immediate context. In an online class, instructors may address students' emotions through emails, discussion forums, or assignment critiques, but it is doubtful that the response time is immediate.

The survey encouraged online faculty to provide comments, feedback or suggestions. This narrative component allowed the faculty to explore their own emotions as well as the emotions of their online student. Through the received feedback, several of the surveyed questions led into themes of the research, which were then coded into themes using a content-analysis of the open-ended questions. Below are randomly selected questions and quotes from the faculty participants, which led to the development of said themes.

Theme 1: Emotion Identification

Ninety percent of the faculty reported that anxiety was the most common emotional experience that their students experience, as determined by key words and phrases displayed by their students. Some examples of "key words" were phrases like

"I'm worried" or "I have so much anxiety about this course". To respond to their students' emotional needs, 98% stated they would send a personal email and provide encouragement. When asked how students express their emotions within the online course room, 87% of faculty reported that the student will send an email, either positive or negative, in nature. An example of a positive email would be a student making comments such as "I have really enjoyed this course and appreciate the attention you gave the whole class." A negative email would be expressed as "You only care about a paycheck-you don't care about online students at all." Many will also attempt to gain support from their fellow cohorts by posting comments within a public discussion forum such as "Does anyone else find this class and instructor difficult?" Table 3 provides the distribution of Question 1.

Theme 2: Emotional Expression

How do you express your emotions when teaching an online class?

Online faculty reported a variety of ways they express emotions while teaching an online class. Faculty reported expressing emotions through helpful and open communication. Helpful and open communications can be operationally defined as supportive and encouraging statements like "you are doing a great job" and "I know that online learning can be difficult. Just try not to give up." These can either take place through a class announcement or group discussion, as well as a personal and confidential email. The most common form of helpful communication takes place via email, because of confidential nature. To provide a blanket level of encouragement, open communication is facilitated through a class announcement, such as "I wanted to touch base with the class and let you know that I really felt our weekly discussions went well." One

Table 3: Question 1

When teaching an online course, which types of emotional qualities do your students experience?	Percentage	Frequency
Anxiety	89.8	44
Frustration	81.6	40
Happiness	69.4	34
Delight	26.5	13
Sadness	4.1	2
Anger	32.7	16
Fear	57.1	28
Disgust	8.2	4
Shame	6.1	3

Table 4: Question 4

How do you express your emotions when teaching an online class?	Percentage	Frequency
I don't express my emotions	16.3	8
I will use Emoticons	24.5	12
I use positive or negative language	53.1	26
Through my grading process	28.6	14
I provide encouragement	87.8	43

Table 5: Question 2

In what ways do you respond to online students' emotional needs?	Percentage	Frequency
I will send a personal email	98	48
I will call the student	38.8	19
I will give the student my personal phone number so that they can call me	38.8	19
I provide them with resources so they can get help on their own	61.2	30
I don't do anything	0	0

faculty reported that letting the students know that they are a "real" person too and that all humans have faults. For example, if a faculty member made a mistake within the course, they admitted their fault and let students know that everyone makes mistakes. This faculty member felt that this was a good way to find a common bond. Table 4 presents a distribution of Question 4 and Table 5 presents a distribution of Question 2.

What types of emotions do you feel unprepared to handle?

Faculty described several emotions that they felt unprepared to handle: inappropriate anger, rage, and severe anxiety. There were instances in which one particular emotion stood out to the point faculty felt it needed to be addressed. Three faculty reported that they did not expect such extreme and inappropriate anger, and were not prepared to

Table 6: Question 5

How do online students express their emotions within the online courseroom?	Percentage	Frequency
I haven't noticed that students express their emotions	8.3	4
They complain	68.8	33
They disclose too much personal information	33.3	16
They send emails, either positive or negative	87.5	42
They attempt to gain support from other students	43.8	21
They use inappropriate language or concepts	12.5	4

handle it. Three different faculty stated that their students were so full of rage that they were unprepared as to what to do with such emotion. Examples include threatening emails, using negative and hostile words of anger, and encouraging their peers to do also show hostility towards the faculty. In five instances, faculty discussed that there were difficult emotions that were out of their realm of expertise, such as severe depression, suicidal thoughts, or extreme difficult life situations such as rape or drugs. This was demonstrated by students posting personal examples within their weekly academic discussion forums. Other faculty reported that several students implied that the faculty did not care about their success or failure in the course, even to the point of demonstrating resentment and anger. Table 6 presents a distribution of Question 5.

Finally, online faculty found that in their experiences teaching online courses, 50-75 percent of students are faced with anxiety and fear, based on the words they use, the examples they give and the overall tone of their contributions to the course. In online classes, words that express anxiety and fear may take the form of "I am scared I'm going to fail this class" or "I'm so nervous about the online class". An example of anxiety-laden tones of contributions may be displayed in a discussion forum in this manner: "I hope I am doing this right, but I don't know".

Theme 3: Additional Training Needed

What kind of training do you feel would benefit you as it relates to identifying online student emotions?

When it came to training and continuing education, online faculty members felt they could use some assistance in several areas: disclosure of personal information, responding to intimate questions, and psychological issues. One of those areas was how to express to students their level of disclosure of personal information. For example, one faculty stated that during one weekly discussion forum about substance abuse, several students had posted information about previous suicide attempts, rapes and drug-overdoses.

Another suggested training activity by the online faculty is one that teaches them how to respond to the level of intimacy that students portray within an online environment. Another proposal was to have training in psychological disorders, symptom recognition, and how to appropriately deal with emotional situations. Faculty reported that they often serve as the role of "counselor", and they are not prepared to take on that role. Having an awareness of the "red flags" or cries for help, would enable faculty to know when intervention was appropriate. A final recommendation made by online faculty is to have a guide for not only them, but the students. Giving on-

line students information on what to expect from an online course could be crucial to their success. This is more than the academic portion of what to expect, but an inclusion of the types of feelings, emotions and behaviors that an online student may go through.

Theme 4: The Emotional Awareness of the Faculty

A fourth theme suggests that online faculty members are aware of their emotional responses while teaching in the online environment, but often do not know how to address their own emotions within the online format. Based on comments on the survey, instructors are concerned about the emotions of their students, and the emotions that they portray. Of the faculty surveyed 75% of them reported that frustration was the most common type of emotion they experience while teaching an online class. When responding to the emotional needs of the students, 98% of faculty stated they would send a personal and encouraging email to the students. Thirty-nine percent of faculty would place a personal call to the student over the telephone. No faculty reported that they simply did not do any-

thing to help the student. They report caring about their online students' emotional needs, even if they are experiencing personal emotions of frustrations. If they realize they are having those emotions, they report handling themselves in professional and academic manners.

The statements made by the faculty reported that overall, they can easily identify their personal level of emotional awareness as well as the emotional awareness of their students. For those emotions that faculty feel unprepared to handle (severe anxiety, rage, and anger), a strategy that can be used to encourage online faculty to improve and maintain emotional awareness is to seek supervision. One faculty stated "teaching online pedagogy is different from face-to-face-forum discussions often take the place of classroom discussions and the professor needs to make extra effort to interact with students and share his or her own emotions to draw that out of others". Having a supervisor that can look at both sides of a situation from an outside perspective may give the online faculty member a different view of their emotions. This may be a direct faculty supervisor, or someone from the university's counseling

Table 7: Question 3

What types of emotions do you experience when teaching an online class?	Percentage	Frequency
Anxiety	39.6	19
Frustration	75	36
Happiness	62.5	30
Delight	47.9	23
Sadness	10.4	5
Anger	8.3	4
Fear	12.5	6
Disgust	8.3	4
Shame	2.1	1

center, or including a designee from Student Services. One faculty member surveyed reported that they try to keep negative emotions out of their communications, but that sometimes it may be difficult. Another reported that if necessary, they would seek recommendations from their university's counselor. Table 7 presents a distribution of Question 3.

Theme 5: Psychiatric Symptom Identification

Faculty reported over 90% of their students experience anxiety while taking an online course. This concurs with McKnight's (2010) research of anxiety within traditional and video-conferenced learning. Creating a strategy to identify and prepare faculty to handle student's extreme clinical issues (substance abuse, crisis, and suicidal ideations) should be addressed before the course begins. This strategy could be in the form of a training video explaining the different examples of student's emotions. One surveyed faculty member stated that they were unprepared for the level of anger and rage displayed by their student. They were concerned because the probability of the student displaying those emotions in a face-to-face class would more than likely be low. They stated "the student had so much resentment and anger-especially when they imply that I do not care about them or their success/failure in the class". Faculty members recommended listing "hot button" words that would signal to the faculty member that the student was close to projective emotions like rage and frustration. Table 3 lists words that can cue the faculty into the potential for an emotional reaction by the student. As a result, creating a "netiquette" video on the proper ways to communicate and express emotions and feelings via the internet and online classes would give both faculty and students baseline knowledge of how to identify their own emotions and the emotions in others.

The online faculty proposed the need that includes additional training in mental health symptom identification. Several faculty hinted to the fact that they take on a "counseling" role, and have not been trained in clinical psychology or counseling. What they found was that on numerous occasions, online students would reach out to them via discussion forums or personal emails describing detailed events in their life that demonstrated they could benefit from counseling services. However, many of the online faculty were not counselors, but facilita-

tors of the course, therefore leaving a gap in services.

One strategy to assist online faculty in their task of working with online students is to develop a guide to emotional awareness. This guide would provide basic psychological information on emotions, mental illness, substance abuse awareness, and a description of when a student may be at risk. For example, the guide should contain the definition of anxiety with examples of some psychological and physiological symptoms that accompany it. Clinicians are aware that the American Psychological Association (2007) defines anxiety as a form of apprehension that can be accompanied by somatic and psychological symptoms of tension, in which a person may anticipate misfortune, catastrophe or impending danger. As an example of the information readily available to faculty, the emotional awareness guide is listed in Table 8.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

With the popularity of online coursework, it is inevitable that future research will include the affective component of online education. It is also expected that the research will be faced with limitations. A recommendation for future research is to develop an emotional awareness guide for online faculty to use in the identification of students' emotional needs and ideal responses given, for specific emotions that are appearing in online education. This includes the research and exploration of emotionally-laden words that may cause the faculty to perceive a red-flag for the student's emotional issues. For example, a large proportion of online faculty reported they were not prepared to handle the extreme anger and rage that online students portray within the online course room. An effective guide will coach online faculty into the identification of aggressive statements, how to deescalate angry and raging students, and redirect their aggression into productive behaviors within the course room.

Table 8: Emotional Awareness Guide Example

Emotional Red Flags	Potential Disorder	Symptoms	Action
Words like: • I'm worried. • I'm scared. • My stomach hurts when you don't reply instantly.	Anxiety	• Apprehension • Thoughts of impending doom or dread • Anticipation of the worst possible outcome	If the student is experiencing anxiety, the main goal is to ease their tension. Anxious students expect immediate contact and response and become uneasy when faced with the unknown. Give your student boundaries with set office hours and a time frame from which you will reply to email, grade, etc. Provide positive and upbeat words so that written communication is not taken out of context.
Words like: • I can't stop crying. • It just seems hopeless. • I'm losing weight because I'm so upset. • I just don't want to go on anymore.	Depression Possible suicidal thoughts	• Feelings of hopelessness • Weight gain/loss • Sleeplessness • Thoughts of hurting self • Feelings of worthlessness • Loss of interest in pleasurable activities.	Depression is a mental illness in which someone may feel hopeless, beyond typical "feeling blue". For the student who has made comments that lead faculty to believe they are within the realm of hurting themselves, they should contact their supervisor immediately. Provide the student with the University's Counseling Center or Suicide Hotline If student does not appear at-risk for suicide, then encourage them to find support through the University Counseling Center, friends or family, or ask their family practitioner about depression. Let the student know that they are a valuable member of the class and you will help them to succeed.

Author Biography

Dr. Jodi McKnight is a native of Southern Illinois, graduating from Capella University, with a Doctorate of Philosophy in Psychology. She holds a Master of Education in Counseling from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Lindenwood University. Dr. McKnight is also an Illinois Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor. She has over 15 years of experience in the clinical realm serving as the Director of Behavioral Health at a community mental health center. She has supervised programs in substance abuse, outpatient mental health, psychiatric rehabilitation, assertive community treatment, community support programs, youth services, as well as psychological assessment oversight. Dr. McKnight currently teaches both face-to-face traditional classes, non-traditional adult classes and online classes in Psychology and Counseling. She develops course curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate courses. Her current research lies in the fields of education, emotional responses, and online learning, where she has published several articles in peer-reviewed journals.

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Appendix A: Faculty Survey

1. When teaching an online course, which types of emotional qualities do your students experience?
   a. Anxiety
   b. Frustration
   c. Happiness
   d. Delight
   e. Sadness
   f. Anger
   g. Fear
   h. Disgust
   i. Shame
   j. Other (please specify)
2. In what ways do you respond to your online students' emotional needs?
   a. I send a personal email
   b. I will call the student
   c. I will give the student my personal phone number so they can call me
   d. I provide them with resources so they can get help on their own
   e. I don't do anything
3. What types of emotions do you experience when teaching an online class?
   a. Anxiety
   b. Frustration
   c. Happiness
   d. Delight
   e. Sadness
   f. Anger
   g. Fear
   h. Disgust
   i. Shame
   j. Other (please specify)
4. How do you express your emotions when teaching an online class?
   a. I don't express my emotions
   b. I will use Emoticons
   c. I use positive or negative language
   d. Through my grading process
   e. I provide encouragement
   f. Other (please specify)
5. How do online students express their emotions within the online course room?
   a. I haven't noticed that students express their emotions
   b. They complain

      c. They disclosure too much personal
        information
      d. They send emails, either positive or negative
      e. They attempt to gain support from
        other students
      f. They use inappropriate language or concepts
      g. Other (please specify)

6. What kind of training do you feel would benefit you as it relates to identifying online student emotions?

7. What types of emotions do you feel unprepared to handle?

8. How many years of experience do you have teaching online courses?
      a. Less than 1 year
      b. 1-3 years
      c. 4-6 years
      d. 7-9 years
      e. 10 + years

9. Please list the area of expertise or subject matter of online classes that you teach or have taught.

10. Which type of educational institution best describes the affiliation of your online classes?
      a. Private 4-year institution
      b. Public 4-year institution
      c. Community college
      d. Online university
      e. Faith-based institution