Social emotional development: a new model of student learning in higher education

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Abstract

A new construct, called social and emotional development (SED) which is defined as the desirable, sustainable enhancement of personal capacity to utilize emotional information, behaviors, and traits to facilitate desired social outcomes, is presented. The SED model, which includes self awareness, consideration of others, connection to others and impacting change, links the social emotional intelligence and competence development literatures. The purpose of SED is to provide a framework to understand and facilitate increasing student social and emotional capacity to recognize emotional cues, process emotional information, and utilize emotional knowledge to adapt to social challenges in higher education.

Keywords: social emotional intelligence development education

Aristotle once wrote that those who are "angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and the right way are at an advantage in any domain of life" (*Nicomachean Ethics*). Although science has generally focused on a rational explanation of human behavior and performance, it is often the emotional side of our nature that influences our thoughts, actions, and results.

Similarly, although higher education is generally lauded for developing academic knowledge in their students, its leaders are routinely criticized for not adequately preparing students for the types of roles and leaders that organizations need (Jaeger, 2003; Tucker, Sojka, Barone, & McCarthy, 2000; Goleman, 1995; 1998; Williams & Sternberg, 1988). That is, students are often not equipped with the social and emotional competence to fully capitalize on their academic knowledge. It is not enough to produce the best and the brightest technical experts (e.g., arts, sciences, business, education, engineering, music, dental, law or pharmacy). Universities must also address the whole student (intellectual, emotional and social) to better prepare graduates for future success. This requires educators to approach learning as a process that engages students in a teaching and learning relationship that at the very least includes faculty and peers (Harward, 2007; Swaner, 2007). Students who are able to develop their capacity to understand themselves, the world around them, build meaningful relationships, and foster positive changes have an advantage in school, work, and life (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whit, & Associates, 2010; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

A promising field of recent research that may help guide educators in whole student education is in the maturity of social and emotional proficiency. The concept of social and emotional development (SED) is introduced as the desirable, sustainable enhancement of personal capacity to utilize emotional information, behaviors, and traits to facilitate desired social outcomes. A model of SED is proposed that includes four distinct, but inter-related factors: (1) self awareness - the knowledge and understanding of your emotional state, assessing your strengths and limitations, and recognizing your preferences; (2) consideration of others - the thoughtful regard for the person and situation in anticipating the likely consequences before thinking and acting; (3) connection to others - the ease and effort in developing meaningful, quality relationships with others; and (4) impacting change - the propensity to influence others by seeking leadership opportunities and motivating others to change. The purpose of SED is to provide a theoretical and practical framework to understand and facilitate increasing student social and emotional capacity to recognize emotional cues, process emotional information, and utilize emotional knowledge to adapt to social challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SED is the integration of the theory of social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920; Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985), emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1988; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; 1998), and competence development (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993) applied toward educational practice. The next sections discuss how each of these areas contributes to our understanding of SED.

Social Intelligence

First, to understand the current conceptions of SED, it is important to review the underlying theories of social intelligence from which the narrower constructs of emotional

intelligence and SED emerge. Social intelligence may be defined as the ability to understand others, manage people, and act wisely in social contexts (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985; Thorndike, 1920).

Although Charles Darwin, in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), postulated the first scientific theory of emotion, it is E.L. Thorndike's (1920) seminal article, "Intelligence and Its Uses," that is often credited as the origin of the theory of social intelligence. Thorndike (1920) suggested three distinct types of intelligence: (1) abstract or scholastic intelligence, defined as the ability to understand and manage ideas; (2) mechanical or visual spatial intelligence, defined as the ability to understand and manipulate concrete objects; and (3) social or practical intelligence, defined as the ability to understand others, manage people, and act wisely in social contexts. Whereas social intelligence resonated intuitively, psychologists focused on the first aspect—abstract or scholastic intelligence—as attempts to refine, measure, and understand social or practical intelligence proved unsuccessful. In fact, from the 1920s until the 1980s, there was relatively little focus on attempting to re-explore the idea of multiple intelligences. Although several studies attempted to overcome the psychometric and theoretical limitations of differentiating social from traditional intelligence, the results were mixed at best (Ford & Tisak, 1983; Keating, 1978; Thorndike & Stein, 1937).

However with Howard Gardner's 1983 book*, Frames of Mind*, the debate regarding the plausibility of multiple types of intelligence was re-ignited, spawning a series of new scientific inquiries into alternatives to general intelligence theory. Gardner (1983) proposed a new, detailed, multi-model of intelligence along seven distinct constructs: (1) linguistic—written or verbal comprehension; (2) logical—mathematics; (3) musical—awareness and discrimination of sound; (4) kinesthetic—process knowledge through bodily sensations; (5) visual/spatial—conceptual manipulation of objects; (6) interpersonal—leadership; and (7) intrapersonal—self awareness and self motivation. It is the last two aspects of multi-intelligence theory, interpersonal and intrapersonal, that are important to social intelligence and SED. Gardner (1983) defined interpersonal intelligence as the "capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and, consequently, to work effectively with others" (p. 43); and intrapersonal intelligence as the "capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself—including one's own desires, fears, and capacities—and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life" (p. 43). The two definitions legitimized the potential theoretical orientations of Thorndike's (1920) concept of multiple intelligences. Specifically, Gardner's (1983) elaboration of Thorndike's (1920) social intelligence theory into two distinct traits, interpersonal and intrapersonal, provides the content domain for emotional intelligence and SED.

With Gardner (1983) opening the door, other scholars emerged to fill the gaps for this re-evaluation of social intelligence theory. One such scholar was Robert Sternberg (1985), whose seminal work, *Beyond IQ: A triarchic theory of human intelligence*, divided intelligence into three distinct components: (1) metacomponents – executive or control processes; (2) performance components – execution of strategies for task performance; and (3) knowledge-acquisition-components – gaining new knowledge. Based on his understating of the underlying components of intelligence, Sternberg (1985) proposed the successful intelligence construct. Successful intelligence is defined as those "who recognize their strengths and weaknesses and who capitalize on their strengths while at the same time compensating for or correcting their weaknesses" (Hedlund & Sternberg, 2000, p. 138). For Sternberg (1985), there were three broad types of abilities that derive from successful intelligence: (1) analytic – analyze, judge, compare

and contrast; (2) creative – cope with novelty; and (3) practical – accomplish goals. Whereas analytical intelligence sits squarely within the current research on general intelligence, and creative intelligence is still in its infancy (a similar state to early social intelligence inquiries, requiring greater definition and clearer measurement), it is practical intelligence that is most applicable to social emotional development and is defined as "the ability to accomplish personally valued goals by adapting to the environment, shaping (or changing) the environment, or selecting a new environment" (Hedlund & Sternberg, 2000, p. 138). Practical intelligence has provided researchers with new hope in distinguishing, psychometrically as well as theoretically, between academic (abstract) and practical (social) elements of success.

Emotional Intelligence

The second theoretical area from which SED draws from is emotional intelligence (EI), which has been described as the ability to monitor, discriminate and use emotional information to facilitate thought (Bar-On, 1988; Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In general, EI may be defined as the overlap between emotion and intelligence, or more simply, the intelligent use of emotions. This juxtaposition between emotion and intelligence assumes not only potential ability or capacity, but also preferred emotional patterns and actual emotional behaviors.

Currently there are hundreds of articles on EI, with dozens of competing models and measures that utilize the EI term. However, three main streams of research in the literature, as outlined by Seal and Andrews-Brown (2010), helped to originate and popularize the concept of EI and form the foundation for the majority of models and measure of EI: (1) emotional traits (Bar-On, 1988); (2) emotional ability (Salovey & Mayer, 1990); and (3) emotional competence (Goleman, 1995). EI, therefore, may be viewed as a general construct (similar to personality or general intelligence), defined as a constellation of capacities, patterns, and behaviors to recognize and regulate the emotions of self and others toward successful environmental adaptation. As a result individuals, groups and organizations high in EI might prove more capable of utilizing emotion to better adapt and capitalize on environmental demands. Although research on the relationship between EI and job performance is mixed, a recent meta-analysis found that EI positively predicted performance for high emotional labor jobs in which there is regular customer/interpersonal interaction (Joseph & Newman, 2010).

In 1988 Reuven Bar-On, in his landmark dissertation, The Development of a Concept of Psychological Well-Being, coined the phrase "Emotional Quotient" or EQ. Bar-On (1988) based his construct on positive psychology literature, examining attitudes that paralleled traditional intelligence in explaining psychological well-being (Stein & Book, 2006). Bar-On (2006) defines EI as the "cross section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills, and facilitators that determine how effectively people understand and express themselves, understand others, and relate with them, and cope with daily demands" (p. 14). The emotional quotient model, also called a self-report model based on the method of assessment, focuses on the emotional-social traits or patterns that contribute toward effective psychological functioning, and uses five scales of EI: (1) intrapersonal; (2) interpersonal; (3) stress management; (4) adaptability; and (5) general mood. The emotional trait model was developed from the positive psychology tradition, examining an array of non-cognitive traits that enhance personal functioning.

Although Bar-On (1988) was the first to use the EQ designation, it is Salovey and Mayer (1990) who are frequently cited as the originators of the modern EI construct in their seminal

article, 'Emotional Intelligence' in *Imagination, Cognition & Personality* (1990). Salovey and Mayer (1990) based their construct on the social intelligence literature which provided the theoretical justification for the narrower EI construct. Salovey and Mayer (1990) originally defined EI as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). The emotional ability model, also called a performance based model because of the method of assessment, focuses on differentiating individual levels of specific emotional reasoning capacities, and uses four branches of EI: (1) perceiving emotions; (2) facilitating thought; (3) understanding emotions; and (4) emotional management (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). The emotional ability model was developed from an intelligence-testing tradition formed by the emerging scientific understanding of emotions.

Whereas Bar-On (1988) may have originated the concept of emotional quotient and Salovey and Mayer (1990) may have coined the phrase emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman's best-selling 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* is credited with popularizing the construct. Goleman's (1995, 1998) original construct linked the earlier work of Boyatzis (1982) and Spencer and Spencer (1993) on competencies to emerging research in affective neuroscience, focusing on behaviors that link to successful outcomes. Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee (2000) defined EI as "observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation" (p. 344). The emotional competence model, also called a mixed model based on the method of assessment, combines aspects of intelligence and emotion that impact performance, and uses four clusters of EI competencies: (1) self-awareness; (2) self-management; (3) social awareness; and (4) relationship management. The emotional competence model was developed from a competence-based tradition formed by the emerging scientific understanding of differentiation competencies in workplace performance.

Competence Development

The next area from which SED draws from is competence development. Competencies involve a set of related behaviors, organized around an intent that leads to a successful outcome (Boyatzis, 1982; Boyatzis, 2009).

Competency research emerged from a parallel line of inquiry to emotional social intelligence, albeit with a narrower focus on explaining and predicting effectiveness in various occupations (rather than general psychological well-being or emotional cognitive processing), often with a primary emphasis on managers, leaders, and professionals (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). In the competency approach, specific capabilities that linked explanation and prediction of performance were identified and validated, using effectiveness assessment, and then articulated as competencies. Through the linking of distal (or underlying) physiological traits or capacities to more proximal (or observable) actions or capabilities, the field of competency research is beginning to undertake how best to understand these complex social and emotional process integrations (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004).

In the purest sense, a competency is defined as a capability or ability that leads to a successful outcome. It is a set of related but distinct sets of behaviors organized around an underlying purpose or goal, called the intent. Competencies, therefore, are the result of appropriate behaviors that emerge from the intent, that are used effectively in the situation, in

order to further some underlying purpose. For example, listening to someone and asking him questions are several behaviors. A person can demonstrate these behaviors for multiple reasons or to various intended ends. A person can ask questions and listen to someone to ingratiate herself or to appear interested, thereby gaining standing in the other person's view. Or a person can ask questions and listen to someone because he is interested in understanding this other person, her priorities, or thoughts in a situation. When used successfully, the latter is a demonstration of empathy. The underlying intent is to understand the person. The former underlying intent is to gain standing or impact in the person's view, elements of a demonstration of influence.

In relation to the current model of SED, there is growing evidence that demonstrates, not only a clear impact of social and emotional competencies upon performance outcomes, but that competencies, by their nature, can be developed. As argued by Spencer (2001), meta-analytic data demonstrate that emotional based training and development programs do develop competencies and subsequently add economic value to firms. More specifically, Boyatzis, Stubbs and Taylor (2002) utilized a 50-year longitudinal study to examine the impact of program changes to an MBA program. The results indicated significant increases in EI competencies that were attributed to five key factors: (1) an explicit philosophy of education; (2) an early course on assessment and development utilizing self-directed learning theory; (3) a focus on specific competency development in targeted courses; (4) a dramatic increase in requiring field projects in companies, group work, and student collaboration; and (5) expanded opportunities for voluntary activities, such as community service and business clubs. Supported by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), competency studies clearly indicated significant improvements in social and emotional competencies through the use of targeted competency development interventions.

Unlike related constructs such as personality and general intelligence, which are largely established in childhood and remain relatively stable through adulthood, competencies by their nature may be improved through the learning process (Seal, Boyatzis & Bailey, 2006). Learning is a relatively permanent change in the frequency of occurrence of a specific individual behavior that occurs as a result of experience, including the acquisition of knowledge, skills and/or understanding. Kolb (1984) defined learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience" (p. 41). The process to help facilitate desirable, sustainable change involves a sequence of discontinuities, called discoveries, which function as an iterative cycle in producing the sustainable change at the individual level. The use of a change model helps individuals manage these discontinuities.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In sum, our review of the literature on social and emotional intelligence and competence development has guided our consideration of a SED model of whole student learning in higher education. SED is a desirable, sustainable enhancement of personal capacity to utilize emotional information, behaviors, and traits to facilitate desired social outcomes. Our model of SED integrates the previously discussed theories and includes four distinct, but inter-related factors: (1) self awareness, (2) consideration of others, (3) connection to others, and (4) impacting change and extends their application to a college population and context. The model is organized along two dimensions: (1) recognition of self and others, which includes awareness and consideration; and (2) regulation of relation and task, which includes connection and impact.

The model is based on the earlier social and emotional intelligence constructs of Bar-On (1988), Goleman (1995; 1998), Gardner, (1983); Salovey and Mayer, (1990), and Thorndike (1920), as well as the more recent work on social emotional competence (Boyatazis, 2009), as indicated in Figure 1 (Appendix).

As with the majority of theories and definitions of social and emotional intelligence, the SED model begins with self awareness. The focus of self awareness is on accurate self knowledge which constitutes the self recognition dimension of the model. Self awareness is defined as knowledge and understanding of your emotional state, assessing your strengths and limitations, and recognizing your preferences and includes emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and tendency identification. *Emotional self-awareness* (emotions) consists of two sub-factors: (1) identify – knowing your current moods and feelings (what are you feeling); and (2) cause – recognizing the triggers for your emotions (why you feel what you feel). *Accurate self-assessment* contains two sub-factors: (1) talents – accurate assessment of your strengths; and (2) limitations – accurate assessment of your weaknesses. *Tendency identification* (preferences) includes two sub-factors: (1) approach – knowing your likes; and (2) avoid – knowing your dislikes. Taken together, emotions, strengths, and preferences comprise the core of the SED model which is accurate self knowledge and the foundation for whole student learning.

The second factor of the model is consideration of others. The focus of consideration is regard for others which constitutes the other recognitions dimension of the model. Consideration is defined as the thoughtful regard for the person and situation in anticipating the likely consequences before thinking and acting, and includes empathy and self monitoring. *Empathy* includes two sub-factors: (1) understand – knowing how others are feeling; and (2) value – discerning the importance of others. *Monitoring* also comprises two sub-factors: (1) recognize – anticipating consequences; and (2) regulate – thinking before speaking or acting. Taken together, empathy and monitoring provide the foundation for regard for others. In whole student learning this factor may moderate the ability to recognize and understand the perspective of others with resulting effects on everything from the ability to interpret literature, to classroom discussions, to the outcomes of roommate conflicts (Colby & Sullivan, 2009).

Connection to others is the third factor of the model. The focus of connection is building meaningful relationships, and constitutes the relation regulation dimension of the model. Connection is defined as the ease and effort in developing meaningful, quality relationships with others by exchanging thoughts and feelings and includes sociability and intimacy. *Sociability* involves two aspects (1) ease – comfort in establishing relationships; and (2) effort – energy in maintaining relationships. *Intimacy* includes (1) communication – sharing thoughts and feelings; and (2) care – level of honesty and trust. Sociability and intimacy form the basis for building meaningful relationships with others. Whole student learning is based on the premise of engagement in learning relationships with connection to others as key to opportunities for deep learning (Kuh et. al, 2010).

The final factor of the model is impacting change. The focus of impact is to positively influence others, and constitutes the task regulation dimension of the model. Impact is defined as the propensity to influence others by seeking leadership opportunities and motivating others to change. Impact includes initiative and inspiration. *Initiative* contains (1) position – take the lead role; and (2) ambition – enjoy taking charge of groups. *Inspiration* incorporates (1) motivation – inspire others; and (2) charisma – confidence in leading others. Initiative and inspiration provide the foundation whereby a person can positively influence others.

As an integrative model, SED provides a theoretical framework to understand student behavior and to plan potential interventions by focusing on student competencies and increasing the student's capacity to recognize multiple emotional cues, implement diverse behavioral responses, and expand the range of possible social outcomes.

Let us consider a recent, public example of SED in action, LeBron James' *Decision*. For those who are not familiar, Mr. James (a professional basketball player, formerly employed by the Cleveland Cavaliers, now signed with the Miami Heat) decided to have a one-hour ESPN special, eight days into the NBA free agency frenzy, to announce to the public which team he will join next season. Although it cannot precisely be known what Mr. James was thinking, it is probably safe to assume that he did not expect the sort of backlash that was sparked by his decision, including the burning of his jerseys, the vitriol letter from his former employer, the sense of betrayal by fans, and the mounting criticism from commentators and even former players. Not only was he critiqued for his final choice (to leave Cleveland and join Miami) but also for the manner in which that choice was made public (through the one-hour special on LeBron). In terms of the first factor of our proposed model, awareness, one could argue that this is an area of competence for LeBron. He recognized how he felt, where his strengths lay, and what he wanted. But being self-aware is only the first part, and unfortunately he struggled with the next factor, specifically in his consideration of others. Cleveland, which has long suffering fans, expected him to return. The team had mortgaged the future to try and provide a winning team around him. To leave Cleveland, particularly so late in the free agency period, and to do so on national television was showing a lack of empathy and self-monitoring on the part of LeBron. In terms of connection to others, it was his strong, intimate connection with the other players in Miami (Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh) and the lack of an honest and trusting relationship with his former team that helped to facilitate his decision and the manner in which he chose to make it public. As for impact, although the long-term ramifications will not be known for some time, it does appear that his national brand, King James, has suffered. Even if he wins multiple titles, to some extent, those accomplishments will be shadowed by his decision to take the easy way out and surround himself with a team of all stars. If Mr. James was a student, and this pattern of behaviors and outcomes were consistent, then you would have someone who is competent in self-awareness, may want to develop consideration of others, and is on the threshold for connection to others and impacting change.

Our proposed model can be used in higher education as both a diagnostic tool, assessing student competence levels for each factor, as well as a development tool, assisting students in understanding and targeting potential strengths and limitations in their behaviors. Once students are assessed on competence levels for each factor, a development plan can be created. According to the theory of self-directed change, learning occurs when an individual articulates a discrepancy between where he is and where she would like to be and formulates a development plan to achieve the goal with feedback along the way (Boyatzis, 1994; 2006; Taylor, 2006). Through a coaching process students would be encouraged to actively seek opportunities to work on the competency issues uncovered by the social and emotional assessment. For instance, a student who wanted to further develop the "impacting change" area could look for opportunities to be an officer of a club on campus.

DISCUSSION

Philosophers and social scientists have long wrestled with the phenomenon of emotion and its impact on human relationships, debating the nature and extent to which emotion influences the human decision-making processes and the subsequent relational outcomes of those decisions. The present paper makes a unique contribution to the growing literature on social and emotional competence. It has long been maintained that social and emotional competencies are critical to success in the workplace (e.g., Goleman, 1995). However, a large portion of the existing research on developing or training these competencies has focused on working adults, executive training programs, and MBA students (e.g., Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002). Lindebaum (2009) suggested that workplace training programs might not be the best medium to develop emotional competencies due to barriers such as employer policies that shape employee behaviors. Attempting to develop on-the-job emotional competencies has been described as a short-term job-centered, training method whereas a whole-person education approach calls for more extended efforts (Lindebaum, 2009). A whole person approach to developing emotional competencies "may be better framed as a personal development undertaking, where individuals exercise responsibility and self-direction in their education" (Lindebaum, 2009; p. 234).

A model of SED was presented for college students. This population is distinct from working adults in several key ways. College students tend to be younger with less work experience and are undergoing major developmental changes from adolescent to adult. The college campus presents unique opportunities for social interaction that are especially relevant to the proposed model, since being successful in college calls for students to be fully engaged emotionally and socially with their peers, teachers, and other members of campus. Thus, social and emotional development is a key quality of value to higher education institutions in addition to students' future co-workers and managers. This is particularly important in a world where so many social interactions are technology driven and limited in scope.
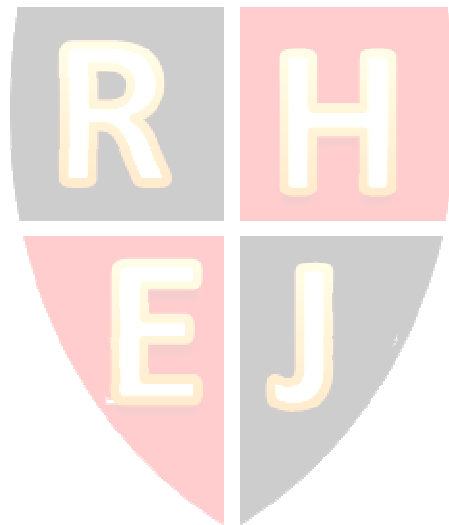
SED provides a potential model of understanding and intervention for educators to examine and enhance the capacity of students to interact in an emotional and social environment. Too often, educators focus on narrow discipline based content delivery, ignoring the full growth potential of our students. This is particularly the case in higher education, where the maturation of our students, transitioning from teenagers to young adults with the future expectations of career, family, and friends (not to mention significant debt in many cases) is often ignored both inside and outside the classroom. By focusing attention on whole-student development, including social and emotional along with more traditional academic skills, higher education will be better positioned to prepare students for an increasingly dynamic world as well as provide greater value added benefit for the time and cost of education.

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Appendix
FIGURE 1
Model of Social and Emotional Development

Social Emotional Development Inventory

Aware - *Self*

4. Mastery

3. Competent

2. Threshold

1. Develop

Impact

Task

Regulation

Consider

People

Recognition

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Connect - *Other*