The Emotionally Aware Teacher: Enhancing EI through Reflection and Tracking

Teague Teece Davidson
Graduate Student
Teague.teece@oregonstate.edu

Josh Stewart, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Josh.stewart@oregonstate.edu

130A Strand Hall
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon 97331
541-737-3552

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Introduction / Need for Innovation

Teachers face numerous decisions daily that require various aspects of knowledge and judgement (Bransford et al., 2005). Any number of factors can influence decisions teachers make, including the technical aspects of pedagogy and content knowledge (Shulman, 1987), but research on emotions and emotional intelligence since the 1990s has also confirmed that emotions have a direct impact on almost everything we do and say (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Identifying our own emotions is an important component of both social and emotional learning (SEL) and Emotional Intelligence (EI), which, when utilized effectively in the classroom, have been proven to have positive impacts on student outcomes, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2022; Singh & Ryhal, 2021).

The importance of the student teaching internship has been reported extensively in agricultural education and findings have documented how teacher candidates (TCs) may face feelings of inferiority, with self-adequacy concerns about accepting the identity of being a teacher or practitioner (Paulsen, et al., 2015; Sorensen et al., 2018). However, as teacher candidates gain more experience and confidence, their concerns shift from their own inadequacies to the success of their students (Sorensen et al., 2018), continuing the change in identify from student to teacher, as we have seen captured through TC reflections (Fuller et al., 1974; Lambert et al., 2014; Sorensen et al., 2018). Considering this transformational change during the student teaching internship and focusing on the importance of emotional intelligence in teaching, we sought to capture teacher candidates' reflections specifically about their emotions, to explore how their emotions may be influencing, or being influenced, by decisions they make about teaching during their internship experience.

How it Works

This idea was based on the Mood Meter, a tool created through ongoing research at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (Brackett et al., 2019) that allows individuals to build emotional vocabulary and improve emotional wellness through reflection and has been replicated in several digital apps (e.g., How We Feel, Mood Journal, MoodMeter). The challenge with these current tools is that, as researchers, we are unable to see any of the data or enhance the apps to be specific to teaching. Our goal was to create a digital tool to track emotional development through the student teaching internship, with access to the data for further investigation.

Prompted by a notification on their cell phone lock screen, the TC answers a preselected prompt created by the researchers. The app cues the TC to select one of four color areas (i.e., red, yellow, blue, green) corresponding to levels of the two core properties of emotions, pleasantness and energy (Brackett et al., 2019) related to the specific prompt. Based on that color response, the app prompts them to select an emotion word within that particular color (feeling) area. Finally, the app asks for a narrative response to, "Why do you feel this way?". We followed recommendations from Sorensen et al. (2018) to capture responses at intervals during the internship (i.e., Weeks 3, 5, 7, 9). The questions were, "How do you feel about planning for

student learning this week?"; "How do you feel about your instructional strategies this week?"; "How do you feel about checks for understanding (formative assessments) this week?"; and "How do you feel about the impact of student rapport on your teaching decisions this week?".

Results / Implications

Unfortunately, the app was not completed in time for weeks three and five, so we created a short survey instrument utilizing skip logic to mimic the app for those two collection points. However, we were able to capture data with the app during weeks seven and nine. Because the app is still in development, we utilized an email prompt with a link to the working version of the app. This is clearly a pilot for a digital tool like this, and hopefully a unique way to link teacher candidate emotions with their development over the course of the internship experience. However, the immediate access to quantitative and qualitative data from the app, and combined with survey instrument data, was valuable to begin exploring the emotional state of the TCs in relation to the specific pedagogical prompts.

Teacher candidates in this group experienced a variety of emotions (e.g., annoyed, concerned, discouraged, fatigued, at ease, comfortable) and it was evident each TC had a consistent pattern of emotions. For example, one TC selected the High Pleasantness, Low Energy quadrant (green) each week, regardless of the prompt. The app was designed to only allow for one emotion word to be chosen, but when TCs struggled to label their feelings with one word we adjusted to allow for more than one emotion to be selected within the color quadrant. There are too many variables and unanswered questions to report any findings as research at this time, but we do have evidence that a digital application like this to track emotions does work.

Future Plans / Advise to Others

Combining these data with observations and further contextual information would be useful in connecting these TC emotions to decision-making or in attempting to make inferences beyond the individual TC. While it may not be practical to capture data from teachers in a singular moment (i.e., Mood Meter), we designed this app as a reflective tool and are now even more interested in trends related to TC emotions and the teacher preparation program. In the future we plan to use the app to track trends of emotional development in TCs during their student teaching experience, investigating a relationship between the stage of student teaching experience and emotional development, in hopes to encourage EI development and potentially improve wellbeing and decision-making. There is also potential to collect data from inservice teachers and university faculty, for comparisons across experience levels and content areas.

Costs / Resources Needed

Developing and supporting a working app like this is time consuming and expensive, but perhaps there are more cost-effective ways to mimic the app to collect similar data if cost is a barrier. We were fortunate to have access to an app design team. The design team projected a cost of $10,000 for a custom development project like this and suggested creating a fee structure and recruiting additional researchers and institutions to offset development and support costs. With unlimited participants and researcher access to data, perhaps there are opportunities far beyond what we have envisioned.

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