Documenting Student Gains in Emotional Intelligence from Program Start to Completion

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Introduction:
The measurement of “Emotional Intelligence” (EI) has been adopted across many educational/employment settings. The inter/intrapersonal skills identified as components of EI are key to effective counsellors and community workers. However, while students’ academic performance in applying theory is routinely tested/measured, faculty members have not quantified the emotional realities of their students, and their shifts in values, attitudes and intrapsychic operations. The research, then, originates in faculty perceptions of student growth in “emotional intelligence” over the life of the program.

The research has been undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team spanning 3 Centres (Community Services, General Education and Access, Student Affairs) with research rooted in one program (Community Worker program), with no external partners or sponsors.

Research Objectives:
- To document student growth in emotional intelligence
- To assess the usefulness of this measure for our students’ reports and experiences of growth in emotional intelligence
- To assess the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative approaches in measuring the “soft skills” in the Essential Employability Skills Framework
- To enrich organizational and personal research capacity in social and community services

Methodology:
A simple test/re-test methodology with two cohorts: 2006-2007 Community Worker students and 2008-2009 Community Worker students, each tested at the beginning and end of the 2-year program

Quantitative Component:
1. Cohort A (58 students) took computerized EI inventory in Sept/06; re-took Inventory in April/07
2. Cohort B’s first survey in Sept/07 with a re-test in April/09

Qualitative components:
1. “Reflection Papers” by Cohort A, written at the end of program, were analyzed and correlated to EI categories
2. Sample of 6 students in Cohort A were interviewed re EI and how they had changed over the time of the CW program
3. Reflection Papers and Interviews for Cohort B to be completed in May/June, 2009

Conclusions:
Test Results
- Quantitative changes were negligible to insignificant with Cohort A
- Qualitative data indicate substantial growth across the factorial components of EI

Methodological Issues
- Substantial difficulties in administering the test to Cohort A, including resistance to and unfamiliarity with the language of EI; these issues addressed in administration of test to Cohort B and resulted in higher participation rates
- Difficulty in aligning pre- and post-test populations (38 of 56 students took post-test)

Timing of post-test had impact on participation and results; post-test for Cohort B to be scheduled earlier in semester

Discussion:
Lack of change in quantitative data over pre/post-test for Cohort A may be explained by some or any of the following formal and informal aspects of the test:
1. Limitations of the test – e.g., formality of language, lack of cross-cultural nuances; some things may not be readily measured
2. Methods of introducing and administering the test to students (e.g., use of the term “test” rather than inventory; mention of “emergency” in Consent Forms; multiple choice testing in a computer lab)
3. Timing of the second test (coincided with end-of-term stresses)

Further explanation/theorizing must await results from Cohort B to see if similar results are obtained

Benefits to Students:
- Understanding Emotional Intelligence and the significance of EI to learning and to workplace
- Deepening students’ capacity to be self-reflective, a fundamental skill in community/social services
- Deepening students’ understanding of research methods and objectives through participation in the study & debriefing
- Increasing employability of students by aligning them with fundamental community paradigm

Benefits to GBC:
- Capturing and documenting student gains over the life of the program
- Confirming faculty perceptions of students’ emotional development
- Informing curriculum and teaching practices to enhance program
- Contributing to institutional research pertaining to 4 of the Essential Employability Skills which MTCU requires all college programs to address

Strategic learning about student needs, perceptions and reflections

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