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The role of emotional capital on initial students teacher training

Bénédicte Gendron⁴
Carmen Rusu⁵

Abstract: This paper presents partial results of an experimental research-action part of a national scientific project implemented between 2014-2019 at the University Paul Valéry. The principal objective is to develop emotional capital of freshmen of Faculty of Sciences Education. In their initial training, two approaches – European tool of Project Management and Mindfulness and Acceptance and Commitment Training were used in order to help students become more flexible, to identify and regulate suitably their emotions and to develop efficient and adaptive relationships with others.

Keywords: emotional capital, emotional competencies, freshmen students, Mindfulness, ACT.

1. Introduction

The role of universities in initial teachers' training, the acquisition of professional competencies, as well as the articulation between academic courses and practice in schools is decisive. What students learn there as relevant, how they manage relations with teachers, how they connect with their future job and responsibilities, how they handle stress are essential for their further personal and professional decisions. In the last years, multiples factors such as time, absence of motivation, number of students or inability to properly respond to different educational circumstances, modify some functions and professionals competencies and demand a quick and efficient adaptation. As Gendron and Lafortune (2009) argue, changes in education create tensions that disturb practical, management and functional teachers' models.

Previous researches outline that teaching is a profession that engages considerable emotional labor (see Schultz & Zembylas, 2009; Harris, 2007; Kelchtermans, 2009; Hochschild, 2003; Nias, 1996). Managing and regulating emotions become crucial competences that discriminates those who stay from those who leave the system. Despite their professional experience, a large number of teachers feel helpless and incapable in contact with difficult and spontaneous educational situations. Schultz and Zembylas (2009) outline that the consequences are not to ignore, due to reports that estimate that nearly 50% of teachers entering the profession leave within the first 5 years.

Actual challenges in educational field highlight the need of an efficient management of emotions, correlated with specific competencies, until now less known and valorized in educational practice – called *emotional competences* and specific to an *emotional capital* (Gendron, 2004). Improving these competences to teachers through initial training can no more be an option, but an exigency, appreciates Letor (2009) who defined them as part of permanent

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conditions of a relational profession which is constructed with and for the students, a profession that demands intellectual, cognitive, affective, emotional and ethics characteristics both from teachers and students.

In this context, since 2014, more than 130 first year university students per year from the Faculty of Education Sciences, future teachers and educators, are direct beneficiaries of a program entitled Emotional Capital, Well Being, Performance and Health. This program is part of a national scientific project Initiatives of Excellence in Innovative Training, aimed at preparing and facilitating the integration of first year university students and at participating to their success through the development of relevant emotional competencies and capital. Developing their emotional capital can be advantageous in demanding emotional circumstances, such as independent living, new academic or professional environments or for new teachers managing a stressful work situation (see Gendron, 2004; Gendron et al., 2016).

The program continues for a 5-year period in order to identify best strategies and to compare main results for different generation surveyed after their first year till their professional integration. Using two methods: a Project Management Methodology (PIA2) and an Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT') derived from the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), the objective is to improve trainees' social and personal emotional competencies (see Schoendorff et al., 2011; Gendron et al., 2016). Preliminary observations after the first two years intervention outlined positive changes such as a better mental health, higher flexibility, and a better stress and anxiety management.

In this article, we will present and develop the concept of emotional capital, declined in emotional competencies and we will discuss main results and conclusions in this phase of the program.

2. Emotional capital in education and development

During the last years, psychologically based theories have specified influential clarifications of how emotional experience is produced and how it affects behaviors and learning processes and life's construction (see Goleman, 1995). More, emotions represent an important source to understand human connections and the environment where they leave and function. Without them, the information received or send is incomplete. Each moment, emotions socially communicate what a person search in her environment, how does she evaluate her self and the others and what are the fears or the challenges she must face with (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). We cannot ignore the role that emotions play in economic theory, if well managed and used. The ability to recognize, to understand, to express and regulate emotions help us to develop better relationships, to take efficient decisions or to cope with difficult life experiences can influence decisive our personal and professional life. For a better description of our theoretical approach, we will present next the significance of emotional intelligence and emotional competencies in the development of emotional capital.

From Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Competencies to Emotional Capital

Goleman, who was the first who popularized the concept of *emotional intelligence*, argued that emotional life is a dominant that can be managed with more or less talent and that require a unique set of competencies-*emotional competencies* (Goleman, 1995). Individuals who improved their emotional capacities or competencies have more chances to be satisfied with their lives, to be more efficient, to control their impulsiveness in order to concentrate to their own work. Later, he outlined that emotional competencies are job skills that can, and indeed must, be learned. He propose a refined framework of emotional competencies where he identified four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and relationship management and recognize them as an adding value to performance (Goleman, 2001).

Gendron argued that this set of emotional competencies (EC) compounds the *emotional capital* (EK) defined as the set of resources that is inherent to the person, useful for personal, professional and organizational development, and participates in social cohesion and has personal, economic and social returns (Gendron, 2004, 2008). Thus, if technical competencies or experiences, referring to the concept of *Savoir-faire* [knowing what to do, technical skills] and in general knowledge to *Savoirs* [knowledge], those two measurements constitute the Becker's (1975) human capital as it has been measured, the set of emotional competencies, which has not been taken into account in Becker's measurement, referring to *Savoir-être* [knowing how to be and behave] (see Figure 1), constitute the *emotional capital* (Gendron, 2004) which has to be highly considered in education and in work place.

Emotional competencies, as other competencies, can be developed and learned (Gendron, 2004) but required a special pedagogy: active, interactive and experiential learning and pedagogy. This pedagogy is about creating learning environments and involving and connecting students to the subject matter they learn about (Dewey, 1938). At least for a successful learning process helping at developing emotional capital, Gendron (2010, 2013a) revisited the learning function or equation for the successful learning function as following: $f(\text{successful learning equation}) = f(\text{affect, cognition, conation})$ which implies different pedagogies and active pedagogy as well.

Different emotional competencies developed through experiences will have an improved effect on individual personality and different returns in personal and professional life. But not all children are exposed since the early age to the same favorable contexts of a balanced development. Those differences of exposure can be a start of inequities in educational contexts and formation; at the opposite, those who are well exposed and equipped of the ad hoc emotional competencies can better succeed. Because of the recognized impact of emotional competencies on performance and on the learning process, they have to be considered as part of the human capital in a broader sense and in its measurement.

Emotional capital as a set of emotional competencies (see Petrides, 2009; Goleman, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) is developed and provided since the early age until adulthood in informal contexts, in personal and social environments as family, neighborhood, peers, communities, societies and school contexts.

Because social environments include the groups to which people belong, the neighborhoods in which they live, the organization of their workplaces, and the policies created to order their lives, it differs from one person to another.

Regarding its effects or returns, neurosciences (see Damasio, 1995; OECD rapport, 2002), reporting on the brain and learning process, brought the evidence that emotional competencies impact the learning process (Gendron, 2013b).

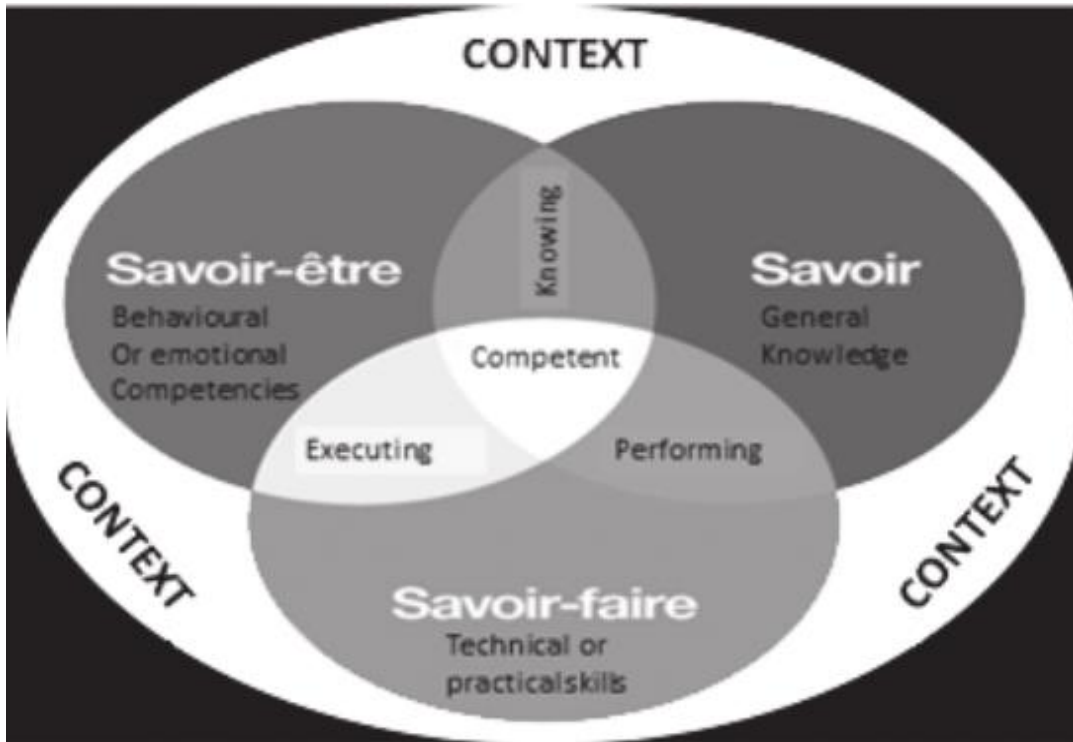


Figure 1: Being competent (Gendron, 2008)

According to the capacity of regulation of emotions, an appropriate emotional capital can facilitate the learning process. Considering school performance and failure, students with too high-esteem can be counter-productive in certain situations where modesty should be appropriate to question him-or-herself regarding his/her own failure. At the opposite end, a too low self-esteem or a lack of self-confidence can impede people to progress or lead to self-censure. An emotional capital that is equilibrated can help individuals to achieve his best potential in the classroom and as future workers at the workplace. His importance becomes decisive for general wellbeing and success in life and indicates the basis for self-improvement, development, and lifelong learning, as well as being able to create efficient connections with others (see Gendron, 2008). Stress at work affects more and more persons, their health and performance and many factors can explain this situation: external factors, environment, management but also internal factors such as the absence of personal resources necessary in different situations. In a time where teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions, recognizing and managing emotions represent a longterm solution to assume professional responsibilities with perseverance and commitment, despite everyday challenges (Day & Quing, 2009).

3. Developing emotional capital of students' teachers through initial training program

Study design. The project Emotional Capital, Well Being, Performance and Health is part of a national scientific project entitled Initiatives of Excellence in Innovative Training. The program is implemented at the University Paul Valéry Montpellier 3 between 2014-2019 and is addressed to first year university students of Faculty Science Education, future teachers and educators, aimed at developing their emotional capital and competences. It proposed the hypothesis that a better emotional capital referring to a set of emotional competences facilitates a better stress management and, indirectly higher performance and efficient integration in labor market and a better mental health and social cohesion. The program was integrated as part of their annual curricula for second semester. The main objective was to develop students' emotional capital: to increase their self-esteem, self-awareness and conscience, stress management, empathy.... The experimental research is based on a traditional scientific design: two groups – an experimental group and a control group with data collected pre and post intervention. For ethical reasons the control group received the ACT' training after the end of the experimental'and data collecting' period. This year, the project finishes its second year with results that are still preliminary but can prove that increasing emotional capital supports and allows a better resilience, a better stress and anxiety management.

During project intervention, emotional capital is developed using an active pedagogical approach incorporating acceptance and engagement training and project management tools. The first approach, *acceptance and engagement training* (ACT'), is derived from acceptance and engagement therapy which postulates that behavior and cognitive avoidance constitutes the main reason for psychological suffering and negative feelings. ACT proposed a new vision that stipulates that suffering is not a sign of pathology (Schoendorff et al., 2011) but an integrative part of human experience. Thus, the aim is not to reduce symptoms or to eliminate the events that generate the suffering but to increase the psychological flexibility in order to accept them (thoughts, perceptions, sensations) and to move toward valued behavior (Schoendorff et al., 2011). More specifically, drawing on positive psychology and educational approaches, workshops on acceptance and engagement and practical of mindfulness reduce the time spent fighting against painful thoughts, emotions and memories in order to use their energy more effectively and productively. The training program follows the same protocol for interventions based on ACT: at minimum, six workshops of two hours.

The main objective of the second approach of the program - *project management tools* –based on an European tool of project management (PIA2) (Gendron, 2014) was to allow students to work in groups, so that they learn about themselves and each other, and become able to evaluate their individual and collective work. Different exercises were used to increase students' commitment and to learn to become active participants in their collective groups projects. From the beginning until the end, each student from each group received different roles and responsibilities that must be accomplished in a specific deadline and following a management guide. During the workshops, students worked in small groups being accompanied by a tutor and continued their work at home or together after classes. The tutor has an important role as a coach, helping and encouraging students to continue and to persist in order to achieve the team objectives.

Institutional framework, stakeholders and data. The program was integrated into the timetable of students from Faculty of Science Education from the second semester of the first year as part of two modules: "Evaluation and orientation in teaching and education" and "Personalized Professional Project". From the beginning, the program was supported by the University Coaching and Mentoring Service and the University Preventive Medicine and Health Promotion Service. The participants consisted of a group of 132 first year university students of education from the Faculty of Education Sciences (final dataset of 97 students made up of 11 males and 86 women, mean age of 20 years). In order to evaluate all the statistical variables, two measures (test-retest) were administrated and each subject signed an informed consent statement at the beginning of first evaluation. The information regarding profile participants and results for the second year is in the preparatory phase and will be published in a future comparative study.

Measures and analysis. Several instruments were used according to specific variables and two dimensions: emotional competencies and ACT measurement. For the first dimension, two instruments were used: *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* (TEIQue) and *Emotion Regulation Profile-Revised* (ERP-R). *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* developed by Petrides in 2009, comprises 153 items, yielding scores on 15 facets, four factors (well-being, sociability, emotionality, self-control), and global trait EI (Petrides, 2009). Secondly, the *Emotion Regulation Profile-Revised* (ERP-R) developed by Nelis, Quoidbach, Hansenne, and Mikolajczak in 2011, is a vignette-based measure. It comprises 15 scenarii describing different types of emotion-eliciting situations. Each scenario features a specific emotion (e.g., anger, sadness, fear, jealousy, shame, guilt, joy, contentment, awe, gratitude, pride) and is followed by eight possible reactions: four considered as adaptive and four viewed as maladaptive (Nelis et al., 2011). For the second dimension, were used tests to evaluate students' mindfulness and awareness and the level of acceptance and engagement. *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale* (MAAS) developed by Brown and Ryan, in 2003, is a 15-item scale distributed across cognitive, emotional, physical, interpersonal, and general domains. As authors mentioned, items were drafted to reflect the experience of mindfulness and mindlessness including communication, thoughts, emotions, and physical states (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Supplementary tests were used to evaluate extend to which individuals have experienced negative emotional symptoms over the past week, academic motivation and general sense of perceived self-efficacy.

Procedure and analysis. Of 132 first year university students from Faculty of Sciences of Education, only 97 students who completed correctly the tests and attempted all the six workshops were register in our database. They completed the evaluation tests at 3-month intervals, in the beginning and middle of second semester. Statistical data was analyzed in SPSS using T-Test in order to identify inter-group differences between experimental group (XP GP) and control group (Ctrl GP) but also to identify intra-group differences between measurements resulted before the training (T1) and after the training (T2).

Results and discussion. Initial results of this program are presented more detailed in previous researches (see Gendron, 2014; Gendron et al., 2016). In this article we will insist on main-intra group differences obtained in T1 and

T2 that highlights the influence of the training on different variables that were measured. Overall, the statistical data allows us to confirm positive changes in students' scores for variables like: up-regulating positive emotions and empathy, but also a greater awareness of level of anxiety and stress which means that students started to know themselves better and to work on their level of stress management. Statistical analysis identified after the intervention program (T2) that subjects from experimental group have better abilities ($M_{XP}=2,425$, $SD= 0,93$) to *manage their emotions and to focus on the positive side* of life events than subjects from control group ($M_{CTRL}=1,968$, $SD = 0,93$). TEIQue allowed us to identify significant difference before (T1) and after (T2) the intervention concerning *social relationships*. Subjects from experimental group are more capable ($M_{XP} = 5,75$, $SD= 0,58$) to develop and maintain efficient relationship with others ($M_{CTRL} = 5,38$, $SD = 0,93$). Analysis of data will continue with further results, but preliminary ones support the benefic role of this early intervention, for students and also for research on initial teachers training. Even if students complete academic courses and programs to become responsible professionals, evaluation of emotional competencies allows a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses that may affect their professional and personal evolution. As emotional competencies and emotional capital change through training and experience, this type of interventions represents only the start, the condition sine non-qua because it is an every day process over a person's life.

4. Conclusion

Teaching is an emotional profession where managing emotions and feelings help teachers respond efficiently to each day challenges. Investing early in what we call emotional capital, based on multiple emotional competencies, allowed them to have positive and adaptive relationship, to cope with stress and to become more resilient and assertive. Regarding educational policies, initial and continuous training programs are necessary to surpass first years teaching, considered the most difficult.

Emotional capital that belongs to the human capital in broad sense is the only one in which individuals can invest in it for its economic, social and personal returns. It enables a sustainable development in the lifelong learning perspective, a better social cohesion, education and work values and commitment in the economic and social life. Institutions, such as university or schools, have their role to play at implementing and setting up such learning environments to develop this essential and useful specific human capital.

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