

**EDU WORLD 2018**  
**The 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference**

**CAN WE DEVELOP EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ABILITIES  
IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION**

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*Abstract*

We live in a world where IQ does not make the difference any longer between professionals in any field. The ones that manage to stand out as leaders employ other abilities than the cognitive ones. In education, mastering content and directing learning have become obsolete practices. Literature has been widely concerned with defining best teachers and best practices and the road to success in education. Recent studies suggest that the premises for leadership in education are laid early and emotional intelligence abilities are considered the key to the teaching profession. In this context, they need to be part of the training student teachers receive during their ITE. Encouraged by the results of previous research on reflexivity in teacher learning, we came to study the effect of different reflective methods on student teachers' performance. This paper presents an approach that educators could adopt in order to develop in their students better self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation or empathy, which in turn affect the way they approach their further professional development. It involves a pattern of asking questions in a certain order that encourages in depth reflection, making implicit beliefs explicit and available for exploration in the process of learning to teach. Analysis of reflective writings from three consecutive years of research with different study groups of student teachers determined us to believe that this is a flexible approach that could be used in any learning context for a variety of professions.

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**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, reflective practice, teacher education.



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Why emotional intelligence abilities matter nowadays?**

Changes in our society nowadays require other type of skills and competences for survival. Facile access to information and the high processing speed that technology offers changed the way we use our cognitive abilities. IQ used to be considered a reliable indicator of people's intelligence, although there are many studies that talk about the numerous limitations of testing. In a highly trained or educated professional group, cognitive abilities are not making the difference any longer. The ones that manage to stand out as leaders employ other abilities than the cognitive ones. In education, mastering content and directing learning have become obsolete practices. The ones that students remember as having a decisive influence on their personal or professional lives are those teachers who know how to relate to their students and peers, the ones that 'care' about their students' problems and needs, about their interests or hobbies, the ones that know well themselves and their students' abilities and are able to share their knowledge with passion and enthusiasm. Many studies enquiring on best practices and best teachers account for the personal traits of character, about the humanity of the interactions that the students value in their teachers (Billett, 2001; Pollard, 2002; Tugui, 2011). Others suggest that the premises for leadership in education are laid early and emotional intelligence abilities are considered the key to the teaching profession (Wilson & Demetriou, 2007; Goleman 2008). In this context, we consider they need to be part of the training student teachers receive during their ITE.

### **1.2. What does emotional intelligence mean?**

In this research, emotional intelligence is understood as a mix of abilities that an individual has or can develop over time in order to successfully manage himself/herself in personal or professional contexts. According to Goleman (2008), this includes among others: self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy and effective relations. Self-awareness refers to one's ability to identify emotions in themselves, to label them, to understand their triggers and their manifestation. Once they know the emotions they are experiencing, people can control them, avoiding impulsive emotional responses and leaving room to more rational reactions. People that know what they are capable of tend to be more motivated and less affected by failure. They face difficulties in a challenging way, as driven by an internal force. At the same time, people that are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, of their emotions and their reactions, can recognize them easily in other people, which increases their empathy and contributes to better relations with the others.

In the context of Initial Teacher Education, we are interested in these abilities in relation to our student teachers as relevant both for their learning to become teachers and for their practice in class in their interactions with pupils.

## **2. Problem Statement**

### **2.1. Why emotional intelligence in teacher learning?**

Sustainable effective learning is connected to one's knowledge about oneself as a learner and about what factors can influence one's performance (declarative knowledge). For this reason, having information about personal learning style, personal beliefs, expectations, is important for teacher learning.

Self-awareness can refer also to student teachers' ability to plan as they can make the appropriate selection of resources that affects their performance, to monitor their performance if they understand the task and their reasons/strategies for approaching it in a certain way, to evaluate taking into consideration their stance and all the factors influencing their performance. At the same time the ability to become aware of distracting stimuli – both internal and external- and sustain effort overtime, seem to be essential for effective learning.

Self-control can refer to students' ability to manage negative emotions in a stressful environment. It involves recognizing triggers and allocating consciously time for rational decision making in a teaching environment. Classroom management require quite a lot of self-control on the part of novice teachers that do not have a wide experience with different classroom situations and might feel overwhelmed.

Self-motivation is a key ability that teachers require when facing work burnout, lack of support or work overload. It involves finding inner resources to continue with daily teaching routines, constant improvement and adaptation to classroom conditions, aiming at reaching objectives no matter the difficulties.

Empathy is important in the context of making the right educational decisions that take into consideration students' state of mind at a certain moment, educational background, home situation, individual difficulties, etc., which in turn reflect on the relations that teachers have with their students.

We believe that emotional intelligence abilities are compulsory for effective learning and teaching, as important as all other professional competences that teachers are required to develop during their education and Initial Teacher Education programmes should address this issue.

### **3. Research Questions**

Encouraged by the results of previous research on reflexivity in teacher learning, we came to study the effect of different reflective methods on student teachers' performance. We adopted a reflective approach that had the potential to increase the quality of reflection and create a reflective pattern in their learning to teach. We started to believe that the same method could develop in our students better self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation or empathy, which in turn could affect the way they approached their further professional development. We started with the following research questions:

1. Is there any connexion between reflexivity and emotional intelligence abilities in the context of Initial Teacher Education?
2. Has the SPIN model the potential to develop emotional intelligence abilities if used systematically during Initial Teacher Education?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to continue and expand on the results of previous research on reflexivity and find further benefits of reflective learning and teaching in the area of emotional intelligence development in Initial Teacher Education. For the purpose of this article, answers to the second question of the research will be explored.

## 5. Research Methods

Whilst learning to reflect is an important goal for student teachers (Kroll, 2004), developing reflective individuals requires habits of mind, moral and intellectual dispositions and improving existing patterns of relationships. It is suggested that educators can develop structures for empowerment which support teachers by creating opportunities for dialogue and for making improvements to practice and policy (Ghaye, 2005; Alger, 2006). There are approaches based on the idea that guidance by means of different instruments can lead to the development of reflective abilities for an individual independent progress in learning (Hill, 2005; Russell, 2005; Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley, 2005; Christie & Kirkwood, 2006).

In my attempt to develop in our student teachers the reflective approaches that could lead to emotional intelligence abilities necessary to cope with any change process in their teaching and promote lifelong learning throughout their career, I have adapted the SPIN model (Rackham, 1996) - situation, problem, implication, need- payoff – which represents a system of specific questions asked in a specific order seeking to identify needs. It consists of four types of questions that help the individual clarify or become aware of some needs, beliefs, problems or dissatisfactions he/she might have.

As the teacher education program needs to prepare students coming from very different backgrounds in a very short period, having different motivation for study and career, which influence the way they perceive courses and acquire new knowledge (Tugui, 2011), it was considered very useful to use an instrument that would help these students make their beliefs explicit. Therefore, it was adapted for the field of teacher education with content specific questions and systematically applied in my teaching during the initial education programme for three years, during three of the courses first year students attended. These courses were taught by the same trainer, who has also researched in this study.

In the first year, the adapted model was perfected, questions were formulated and reshaped, the trainer got used with using the model's questions in her interactions with the students. Each topic discussed was rendered problematic and was approached in four steps (Situation, Problem, Implication, Need-payoff). Students were encouraged explicitly to use it in reflection, as questions can be directed towards oneself when enquiring on self-performance.

For the purpose of this research, there were four tasks completed, every year. Before the students got introduced to any specific content, they were asked to (1) answer a 7-item questionnaire (open-ended questions) about their choice of career, opinions on what is involved in teaching and preparing to become a teacher, qualities that recommend them for a teaching position, knowledge of their interpersonal communication skills and ways to improve them, and (2) to write a reflective essay about their projection of themselves as a teacher. At the end of the first year of their studies, after attending courses and pedagogical practice, they were asked to write two reflective essays: (3) one on their perception of themselves as teachers after two terms of teacher education courses and pedagogical practice, and (4) the other on an issue they considered problematic during the pedagogical practice.

Criteria applied in the analysis: levels of reflexivity (ranging from descriptive to dialogic and critical reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005)), self-awareness references (beliefs, needs, expectations, qualities and lacks) (Tugui, 2011), use of terminology and specific concepts (knowledge of the field), motivation for teaching and learning within the career (intrinsic vs. extrinsic), use of the SPIN pattern (analysis in 4 steps), references to others.

Since the main purpose of qualitative research is the discovery or uncovering of propositions (Cohen et al., 2004), the accurate interpretation of data represented one of my main concerns as a researcher. The issue was attended by careful classification of emerging themes. This study was strengthened by an inter-coder agreement. There was a second researcher who coded the data collected. The second coder was a doctoral researcher in the education area, familiar with the concepts employed in this study, but not involved in any other way in the research. Differences arisen from the two coding processes were negotiated until the two researchers reached an agreement on the meaning of the emerging themes.

## 6. Findings

As to answer the second research question that is presented in this article, in the analysis of the written tasks there could be identified references that were allocated by the researchers to several categories, among which three are related to emotional intelligence abilities – self-awareness, self-motivation and empathy.

Student teacher's writings abounded in beliefs about teaching and teachers they formed during their years of school while observing their teachers performing in class. Relying on that, they spoke about their ideal teacher, their professional dreams and hopes. When referring to themselves as teachers, the place they were at the moment and where they hope to get after graduation, there was a harsh analysis focusing on what they need to learn further, what skills and competences they require, as well as the qualities that recommend and assist them in the process of learning to become teachers. There were differences between early writings and final ones. The terminology they used became more professional and there was a progress in terms of depth and quality of reflection as they advanced with their studies. In terms of self-awareness, we can say that the tasks were considered in itself an opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs, rendering them problematic while they came in contact with new theories about learning and teaching, and trying to make them explicit during these written tasks. As for the use of the SPIN model, we could observe the pattern of the four steps students were using systematically during their courses when discussing or critically analysing different issues, which was also present in their essays when explaining their beliefs about teaching or about themselves as teachers.

In terms of motivation, high levels of intrinsic motivation were a constant in all the four tasks evaluated. If at the beginning of their initial teacher education, students had a positive mental picture of themselves as teachers, having a set of qualities in mind they believed they possessed to become efficient in this profession, at the end of the first year of study their motivation was even stronger, as their expectations of the courses were met and their positive attitude towards learning for teaching was reinforced. We expected to discover high motivation levels, as motivation is one of the entry selection criteria and surfaces during the interviews students have when apply for the programme. Students that enrol on the initial teacher education want to become teachers, they can picture themselves in this role and they are ready to assume everything that is involved in becoming a teacher, for some of them this being the childhood dream. This is very important for sustainable learning throughout the programme and it is supported by the fact that the educational programme is perceived as *"useful"*, *"helpful"*, *"insightful"*, *"inspiring"*, *"encouraging"*, *"supportive"* at the end of the first year of study, just to name a few of the labels extracted from the essays.

Empathy was difficult to identify as writings provided mostly self-centred topics. However, there were passages discussing the difficulties encountered by peers, the new understandings they were gaining from observed teaching practice and sympathy for the teachers dealing with difficult or unexpected situations in class. We believe that more relevant input on this topic could be obtained by reformulating the task instructions.

## 7. Conclusion

In this research article I aimed at discussing the potential that an enquiry model, adapted to the field of Initial Teacher Education, the SPIN model, has to develop emotional intelligence abilities if used systematically during the programme. The larger scale research targeted better performance student teachers by helping them develop reflective approaches in learning in order to use emotional intelligence abilities and in this way coping with all changes they would face in their teaching. Data revealed that guided reflection, if used systematically can facilitate self-awareness and awareness of the influence on and of the others, self-motivation and even empathy, and a certain habit of mind to critically approach professional issues.

The use of the SPIN model during this programme is a particular situation and its application was decided by the researcher in an attempt to make her teaching more effective by improving her students' performance on long term. I believe this systematic enquiry approach to professional issues can be used during any kind of courses as it influences student learning by developing reflexive skills. Although findings cannot be generalised, they can be "related" to similar contexts (Bassey, 1999), as the receivers of this case study, who act in a similar context, can relate their situation to the findings. This research did not aim at generalisation, but it hypothesises that other student teachers and trainers within other Initial Teacher Education programmes experience similar teaching and learning contexts.

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