The Impact of EQ Training on Collaborative Professional Writing

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Introduction

Over the course of each semester, students in 300-level business communication courses can expect to produce a number of various types of messages and reports with emphasis on the psychological development of the message. Although education has traditionally demanded an individual approach to most writing tasks in order to assess student performance, most practitioners in the field of business communication recognize the importance of collaborative writing as a necessary skill in preparing students to enter the job market where teams rather than individuals are the primary work unit (Yost & Tucker, 2000). But why do so many students seem to have difficulty working not only with each other on collaborative writing tasks, but also with the various business-writing scenarios that supposedly simulate what they will also encounter in the workplace? Such collaboration demands the development of sophisticated social and emotional skills (Lopes & Salovey, 2004). However, it is precisely in this area of skills development that modern society, and by extension, our students are lacking.

Most of us recognize the benefits of collaborative writing for our students. We know that collaboration provides opportunities for students to gain new knowledge and abilities, and that it develops intrapersonal and interpersonal skills for working effectively with others. We also know that our students gain valuable experience in working as a team toward a common goal and gain satisfaction in contributing to the performance and product of the group (Webb, 1995). Moreover, evidence shows that cooperation promotes more frequent use of higher-level reasoning strategies, higher achievement, and more accurate perspective than do competitive or individualistic efforts. These cooperative learning experiences also result in students being more mature in their cognitive and moral decision making and in considering the viewpoints of others when making decisions (Johnson & Johnson, 2004).

Incorporating social and emotional skills (EQ) training into the business communication curriculum is an important step in preparing our students to function effectively in a global workplace with its complex informal networks, teams, and participatory leadership, where they must constantly learn new skills and adapt quickly to changing technology (Lopes & Salovey, 2004) and where mastery of interpersonal and group skills are needed to interact effectively with others (Johnson, 2003; Johnson & F. Johnson, 2003). If, as Daniel Goleman believes, professionally successful people have high emotional intelligence in addition to the traditional cognitive intelligence or specialized knowledge (1998c), we can better prepare our students by teaching them not only the cognitive knowledge they will need, but by teaching them the social and emotional skills that will ensure their success personally and professionally.

This study investigates the impact of EQ training on student satisfaction with the collaborative writing process and also analyzes its effect on the writing product. Although previous studies have discussed the importance of incorporating these soft skills into training models for academic and business applications (Mills, Myers, & Rachael, 1991; McGraw & Tidwell, 2001; Greenan, Humphreys, & McIlveen, 1997), little work has been done on its effect on either the process or the product of collaborative writing itself.

Social and Emotional Intelligence

So what exactly is social and emotional intelligence? Researchers have long recognized that there is another form of intellect other than cognitive. The vast body of literature on social and emotional intelligence suggests a number of various interpretations and terminology for the concept including: emotional quotient; emotional literacy; personal intelligence; multiple intelligences; interpersonal intelligence; and intrapersonal intelligence. With this plethora of terms, a working definition of the concept of social and emotional intelligence becomes necessary so that we can become aware of and recognize specific skills competencies for the business communication classroom.

Social Intelligence

While it is generally recognized that the term *social intelligence* originated with E. L. Thorndike (1920), extensive research by Dr. John "Jack" Blakeman, a protégé of Dr. Carl Rogers (1951, 1961), resulted in a practical understanding of social intelligence.

Blakeman's social skill set model illustrates the type and relationship of the different components of social intelligence: 1) *assessing* (arranging the environment, positioning, posturing, observation, and listening), 2) *communicating* (responding to content, responding to feeling, responding to feeling *and* meaning, and asking questions), and 3) *controlling* (making and handling requests, and reinforcing behavior). More advanced social intelligence skills include *initiating skills*, *personalizing skills*, *confrontation techniques*, additional *verbal techniques,* and interpersonal *problem-solving skills* (1984).

This model, based on theoretical constructs, is unique in its practical application of social and emotional skills for use in a professional setting. As such, it provides an important foundation for social and emotional skills instruction in the business communication classroom.

Emotional Intelligence

Harkening back to Thorndike's initial concept of social intelligence and based on Gardner's notion of multiple intelligences (1983), the term *emotional intelligence* (EI or EQ) was first used by Peter Salovey and John Mayer when they defined the concept as a type of intelligence in their seminal paper on the subject in 1990.[1] The term has been most recently popularized in the common vernacular by Daniel Goleman's landmark publication, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) and has sparked much critical inquiry with its personal, professional, and scientific implications.

Each researcher variously defines and measures EQ as to his/her purpose, but the concept has been generally recognized equally as, if not more, important than intellectual intelligence (IQ) as an indicator of personal and professional success (Covey, 1996; Goleman, 1998a, 1998b). Salovey and Mayer define this concept as a [cognitive] "ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotions; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (1997, p. 10).   For others, emotional intelligence constitutes "an array of non-cognitive skills, capabilities, and competencies that influence a person's ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures" (Martinez, 1997, p. 72).   Daniel Goleman's five competencies of emotional intelligence, however, are generally considered to be the accepted starting point for discussion and include: the ability to become self-aware in managing emotions and controlling impulses; to set goals and perform well; to be motivated and creative; to empathize with others; to handle relationships effectively; and to develop appropriate social skills (1995). Mastery of these competencies greatly impacts the way an individual perceives and reacts to internal and external events.[2]

Also essential to an understanding of emotional intelligence is the development of a comprehensive emotional vocabulary. These words are important for communicating not only at an emotional level with others (i.e. articulating the feelings of others), but for increasing emotional self-awareness in oneself (Carkhuff, 1993).   Recent scientific research indicates that the use of such *affective* language not only has a physical effect on the brain, but can also alleviate negative emotions (Lieberman et al., 2007). This ability to perceive, understand, manage, and most importantly, to articulate emotions in ourselves and others is necessary in relating to other people on a social and emotional level.

Social and Emotional Skills and Team-Building

A growing body of educational-based research points to the importance of social and emotional competence in the development of effective teams. Certainly, over the last ten years, a large number of professional development specialists have developed and successfully marketed EI-specific courses for business and industry. And because more businesses are using teams at hierarchical levels, educational institutions are also recognizing the need to prepare students for real-world group decision-making and functioning within the team structure (Kaplan & Welker, 2001). Todd Boyle and Shanna Strong, for example, have proposed a list of key skills for Enterprise Resource Planning, among them interpersonal and team-building and interpersonal skills. Business schools that already have ERP programs can use the list to determine how well they meet industry needs (2006).

Some evidence indicates that these team-building efforts may facilitate and reinforce emotional and social skills learning. Research conducted at the Dublin City University Business School shows that development of team-skills through experiential learning and focus on process results in an increase in emotional intelligence among undergraduate test subjects. These findings suggest that the more time spent on facilitating self-awareness results in deeper self-awareness, and perhaps, a higher level of emotional intelligence competencies (Moriarty & Buckley, 2003).

Conversely, emotional and social skills development may, in turn, facilitate team-building efforts. Researchers at Yale University compared teams with an identical aggregate IQ and found that teams with high emotional intelligence outperformed teams with low emotional intelligence by a margin of two-to-one (Welch, 2003). Similarly, Yost and Tucker (2000) tested the relationship between emotional intelligence and team effectiveness in a problem-based study in which nineteen teams participated in a service industry project. Their findings suggest that high emotionally intelligent teams are more successful, specifically in regard to higher problem-solving abilities, better performance, and better grades. Druskat and Wolff (2001) further assert that emotional intelligence in groups can determine organizational effectiveness. They maintain that, like individuals, the most effective teams are ones that are emotionally intelligent.

This research supports training guru Stephen Covey's beliefs that organizations must be effective at the personal and interpersonal levels. However, Covey believes that personal and interpersonal skills are not enough. To be truly effective, teamwork and synergy must be highly valued by everyone in the culture and individual initiative and maintaining individual responsibility must be rewarded. It is also imperative that team performance objectives focus on desired results and identify guidelines, accountability, resources, and consequences. At the same time, however, people must be allowed the freedom to choose the methods for their own planning, budgeting, evaluation and compensations (Covey, 1996).

Many business schools, recognizing the value of team-building skills training, have already implemented such programs for their students (Moriarity & Buckley, 2003; Thomas & Busby, 2003; McGraw & Tidwell, 2001; Greenan et al., 1997; Mills et al., 1991). Proponents agree that information should not be conveyed solely in lecture-format, but that emotional skills should be taught in an experiential context as well (Kremer & McGuiness, 1998; Dwyer, 2001). Some practitioners have taken it a step further, and urge the use of a team approach to teach interpersonal skills to produce a final acceptable product or attain a pre-determined goal (McGrew & Lewis, 1998).

Few of these studies, however, have actually undertaken an analysis of process *and* product. Rozell, Pettijohn, and Parker explore the measurement of emotional intelligence in undergraduate business majors and discuss the implications for their findings as they relate to management development. In that discussion, the authors raise the question of whether or not EI relates to output measure of student performance (2001). Other researchers argue that it does and maintain that EQ constructs can be managed more effectively by performance analysis than paper and pencil tests (Duelwicz & Higgs, 2000). But despite the predominance of literature on emotional and social intelligence and team building little, if any, research deals specifically with the effect of emotional skills training on the collaborative writing process (of which teamwork is clearly a part) and a resulting performance outcome before and after training.

Purpose and Methodology

This study proposes to address the issue of performance outcome by not only examining student satisfaction with the collaborative writing process but by also examining the writing product generated by student groups before and after EQ training. Our hypothesis is that student awareness of EQ strategies (developing sensitivity to non-verbal messages, defining and

understanding the skills used in articulating an emotional vocabulary in themselves and others, and applying these skills for the purpose of managing business scenarios more effectively) enhances their communication behavior in work groups and improves the quality of response to various business writing scenarios.

Students in four sections of a required business communication course at an AACSB-accredited state university participated in this study during the spring semester of 2007. The study was divided into four sessions: a pre-training collaborative writing task and survey; two EQ training sessions of 1.5 hours each; and a post-training collaborative writing task and survey. In performing these collaborative writing tasks, students were able to practice and to develop the social and emotional skills learned during the training sessions. The survey instrument measured student satisfaction with the collaborative writing task during the pre- and post-training stages; an independent evaluation measured the quality of the writing produced by each group in the pre- and post-training stages.

Test-groups in this experiment, ranging from 3-8 students each, were composed of 88 undergraduate business degree students (55 males; 33 females) ranging in age from approximately 19 to 28. Test-groups were as evenly distributed as possible with males and females to ensure heterogeneity.

The groups were given a general description of emotional and social skills (EQ), and were told that the researchers were investigating the effect of EQ training on the collaborative writing process and product. They were also told that participation was voluntary, and that the study would be divided into a pre-training collaborative writing task and survey; two EQ training sessions of 1.5 hours each; and a post-training collaborative writing task and survey. Initially, some students expressed anxiety about the project, perhaps expecting more of a pedagogical, lecture format, rather than a self-led, non-directed, group learning experience. This sort of reaction is not uncommon. Often students in self-led learning situations experience confusion and dissatisfaction before they settle and develop confidence in the technique (Luynk-Child et al., 2001). Once the idea was accepted, however, and the groups formed, they began to function in various degrees of self-management.

In the first of the four sessions, and without any prior training in professional writing or EQ skills, the groups were given a business scenario (claims message) taken from Lesikar and Flatley's *Basic Business Communication* (2005, pp. 160-61)) that required a written response. Without guidance from the instructor and functioning independently as a team, students were given 50-60 minutes to formulate a group response to the scenario and to put it in the form of an effective business message. Students were then asked to complete a collaborative writing satisfaction survey during the remaining 20 minutes.

The next two class sessions involved EQ training in both a series of brief theoretical lectures followed by experiential learning conducted by a professional trainer in this area for leadership development with non-profit organizations. The trainer drew heavily on Blakeman's and Goleman's work in the areas of social and emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication skills for the content of his training sessions (Appendix 1). Recognizing that "[c]ognitive skills can be taught by lectures, but emotional skills need personal involvement

where the learner experiences the emotional context" (Dwyer, 2001, p. 317), the trainer was also careful to model the behavior for the groups and to incorporate simulations, well-orchestrated role plays, and meta-cognitive exercises into the training sessions. In this way, the groups' experiential knowledge of social and emotional skills supported theoretical knowledge gained in the short lectures. Students were also given a list of emotional words to use in training exercises to quickly develop their emotional vocabularies and stimulate affective brain activity (Appendix 2). Following the seminar, participants were encouraged to think about their own strengths and weaknesses and ways in which they could improve and facilitate their team dynamics and their responses to the writing scenarios based on this basic knowledge of social and emotional skills.

In the fourth and final class session, and without any prior training in professional writing but following the three hours of training in EQ skills, the groups were given another business scenario (claims message) taken from Lesikar and Flatley's *Basic Business Communication* (2005, p.160) that required a written response. Again, functioning independently as a team, students were given 50-60 minutes to formulate a group response to the scenario and to put it in the form of an effective business message. Students were then asked to complete a collaborative writing satisfaction survey during the remaining 20 minutes.

The results from pre- and post-EQ training collaborative writing satisfaction surveys, along with the independent analysis of pre-and post-EQ training writing samples were then compiled and analyzed.

Results

Research Question 1. Did students' satisfaction with their group and satisfaction with their own contributions to the group change as a result of the EQ training intervention?

A 27-item survey was developed to measure students' satisfaction with their group interactions and also satisfaction with their own contributions to the group's work. Means were calculated for the responses to each item on the survey, which was completed immediately following the groups' completion of the collaborative writing task, both pre- and post-EQ training. T-tests for paired two-sample means were calculated. The results show significant differences for eight of the 24 items on the survey (see Table 1 below) ($p<.05$, df=64)).

Table 1: Significantly Different Pre- and Post-Training Means for Student Satisfaction Survey Items

Survey Item	T-statistic	P-value
Group Effectiveness Scales		
Ideas/opinions synthesized effectively	-1.74	0.043
Ideas/opinions encouraged	-1.82	0.037
Good rapport	-1.92	0.029
Tense moments relieved	-2.48	0.007
Equal impact on outcome	-2.82	0.003
Nonverbals noticed by others	-3.44	0.001

Student's Behavior Scales		
Encouraging	-2.35	0.010
Contributions Scales		
Intuitive/emotional contributions	-2.46	0.008

The student satisfaction surveys attempted to capture students' perceptions about their group's dynamics as well as their own behaviors and contributions as the group worked collaboratively on the writing tasks. Results for each of these survey sections are discussed below.

Thirteen survey items asked about the student's group's effectiveness. Table 1 shows that responses to six of the 13 items in this section of the survey significantly differed between the pre-training and post-training writing tasks. For each of these six items, the students' perceptions of their group's effectiveness improved after the training. The factor showing the most improvement was "nonverbal behavior being noticed by others" (p<.001), a finding that was not surprising because of the emphasis on nonverbal communication during the EQ training sessions. Also significant were students' perceived improvements in their group's ability to share equally in the outcome of their writing product (p<.003), their group's ability to relieve tension (p<.007), their group's ability to maintain rapport (p<.029), and their group's ability to encourage and synthesize everyone's ideas and opinions (p<.037 and p<.043).

A second section of the survey consisted of ten items about the student's perceptions of their own behaviors during the group task. Only one item in this section showed statistically significant improvement between the pre-training and post-training satisfaction scores: "encouraging" behavior (p<.01). Thus, it appears that students' satisfaction with their own performance on factors such as listening, responding, resolving conflict, and noticing others did not significantly improve as a result of the EQ training.

The third section of the survey consisted of four items concerning the student's contributions to the group task. The items asked for respondents to rate their satisfaction with their own intuitive/emotional contributions, logical/analytical contributions, engagement with the group, and level of independent work. Although the mean scores improved for all four of these items, only one item in this section showed statistically significant improvement between the pre-training and post-training satisfaction scores: "intuitive/emotional contributions" (p<.008). Considering that the EQ training stressed emotional and social skills, this result was predictable.

In summary, the data support an affirmative answer to our first Research Question. The students' satisfaction with their group and satisfaction with their own contributions to the group significantly improved on a number of dimensions as a result of the EQ training intervention.

Research Question 2. Did the writing quality of the documents composed by each group change as a result of the EQ training intervention?

Each student group composed a writing sample based on a business case taken from their course textbook. The writing samples were assigned immediately before and after the EQ training

sessions. Because this study was conducted at the beginning of the semester, the students had not received any instruction in business writing principles or practices until after this research project was completed. The project was designed to minimize any potential impact of factors other than EQ training on the students' writing ability.

An independent expert in business writing evaluated each writing sample using a rubric developed by the researchers. The rubric consisted of sixteen items: three concerned the document's organization, two were about content, six were about diction and grammar, and five concerned the document's tone and "you-viewpoint." The evaluator assessed each writing sample on all 16 items using a four-point scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Change scores were computed (pre- v. post-training) for each item on the Collaborative Writing Sample Assessment for each student group. Means for each of the four categories of items were computed, and overall change scores were compared for each document using a paired two-sample t-test. Results show that ratings of the post-training documents improved for eight of the 16 items. Of particular interest were changes in the "tone" category, since we expected that the EQ training would potentially impact students' sensitivity to language and emotional tone. While the writing samples composed post-EQ training rated higher than the pre-training samples on three of the five items in the "tone" category, none of the differences reached statistical significance ($p<0.05$).

In summary, the data support a negative answer to our second research question. The students' writing did not improve significantly as a result of the EQ training intervention.

Implications and Discussion

From these findings, we can conclude that the EQ training intervention significantly increased the students' level of satisfaction with the collaborative writing process, particularly in the area of group effectiveness. Improvement in groups' ability to relieve tension and to maintain rapport, and to encourage and synthesize everyone's ideas and opinions enabled the participants to share equally in the outcome of their writing product. Not surprisingly, the training sessions also significantly influenced individual behavior within the group, primarily in the areas of non-verbal communication and intuitive/emotional contributions. Students were better able to communicate at a more emotional level, to perceive an emotional vocabulary in others, and to manage their own emotions and those of others. Consequently, they felt that they became more effective in communicating within the group and more cohesive as a group.

While the effects of EQ training on the process of collaboration are significant in this study, there appear to be no differences in measurement one way or the other as to the quality of the writing product generated by the test groups. We had expected that a greater appreciation of empathy might perhaps have an appreciable effect on the development of *you-attitude* in these writing samples. And although an analysis of the Gunning/Fog Indexes on pre- and post writing samples indicated a slight movement toward writing clarity in the latter, to conclude that this outcome resulted from our EQ intervention would be over-reaching in the context of this study.

Other limitations, though, may have affected the performance outcome of this study. For example, all writing samples were written at the beginning of the business communication course, before students had studied any business writing strategies and skills. The fact that no differences in writing quality were found between the pre- and post-training writing samples is explainable by this circumstance. Because the objective of this research is to help students apply their newly acquired EQ skills to group work as well as to business writing tasks, we hypothesize that sustained EQ training over a longer period of time will make a difference in the writing product generated by these groups.

Future research will continue with additional test-groups. We will examine the impact of EQ training sessions over the course of a semester, so that the internalization of these social and emotional skills becomes more second-nature to the participants. In this way, the groups will have more time to put these skills into practice and more time to internalize them in the process of writing. In addition, we plan to further refine the student satisfaction survey and the writing samples assessment instrument in order to identify pre- and post-training differences that could not be captured with the current macro scales.

Conclusion

Significantly, although no quantitative measures were used, the instructors involved in this study noticed an overall improvement in the students' attitude toward the course and in their response to business scenarios and the writing process. We can conclude that increased proficiency levels in social and emotional skills, coupled with training in making and handling requests, can perhaps be directly related to students' academic success and perception of success in business communication.

More importantly, however, the importance of preparing our students to enter a job market where project collaboration is expected and excellent communication skills are in high demand cannot be overemphasized. Business schools should consider including a required course in social and emotional skills as a part of the business communication curriculum. Such a course must necessarily include not only course content, but also ample opportunity for experiential learning and internalization of those skills along with their practical application in a business context.

Endnotes

[1] Certainly, multiple intelligences exist and as such social and emotional intelligence are not mutually exclusive. They are linked inexorably with other forms of intelligences such as musical, spatial, kinesthetic, and logical-mathematical (Gardner, 1983). Research suggests that *both* social intelligence and emotional intelligence skills are essential for personal and professional success. Our investigation of EQ training and its impact on the collaborative writing process and product, however, focuses primarily on social and emotional intelligence (interpersonal and intrapersonal) as described above and refers to those various skills that help us connect emotionally to ourselves and other people or events, learn behavior and emotional responses

from others, create the ability to share positive and meaningful experiences with others, and relate to how they are feeling.

[2]Victor Dulewicz and Malcom Higgs have compiled an excellent table which details emotional intelligence in terms of self-awareness, emotional management, self-motivation, empathy, relationships, communication, and personal style, and further itemize specific elements within each category according to the major proponents in the field (2000, pp. 343-345).

Appendix 1: EQ Training Key Competencies

Interpersonal Communication Skills
Persuading and Influencing Others

- Social skills
- Emotional intelligence skills
- Verbal techniques
- Rules of confrontation
- Interpersonal problem-solving

Non-Verbal Communication Skills
Increasing Probability of Productive/Desired Outcome

- Kinesics
- Proxemics
- Paralanguage
- Haptics
- Facial expression
- Chronemics
- Appearance
- Context

Social Skills
Facilitating, Managing and Building Relationships

- Arranging
- Positioning
- Posturing
- Observing
- Listening

Communication Skills

- Responding to content
- Responding to feeling
- Responding to feeling and meaning
- Asking questions

Controlling/Supervising Skills

- Handling requests
- Making requests
- Reinforcing behavior

Emotional Intelligence Skills
Used in Conjunction with Non-Verbal, Social, and Intellectual Skills

- Developing emotional vocabulary
- Raising emotional self-awareness
- Demonstrating empathy
- Self-motivating
- Regulating and managing emotions
- Managing other people's emotions

Managing Interpersonal Conflict

- When to confront
- Confrontation ground rules
- Destructive versus constructive conflict
- Conflict tactics
- Managing conflict

Appendix 2: Emotional Words

Intensity Levels of Some Emotional Words

INTENSITY		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
	CONFUSED	Bewildered Disoriented Stunned Baffled, Amazed Perplexed Flabbergasted Astonished	Puzzled Doubtful Surprised Perplexed Befuddled Distracted Disorganized	Misled Undecided Uncertain Lost Dazed Unsure Indecisive
	SCARED	Terrified Overwhelmed Panicked Petrified Alarmed Fearful	Worried Tense, Dread Shaken Anxious Afraid, Panicky Panicked	Startled Surprised Uneasy, Edgy Apprehensive Hesitant Uncomfortable
	ANGRY	Furious, Raging Irate, Hateful Incensed Hostile Indignant Outraged Exasperated	Aggravated Irritated, Irked Mad, Annoyed Offended, Sulky Ticked off Sullen, Fuming Provoked	Perturbed Hassled Bothered Fuss Fret Displeased Peeved
	SAD	Grieved, Crushed Gloomy, Hopeless Heartbroken Devastated Despairing Distraught Heavyhearted Miserable	Dejected Dismayed Hurt, Hurting Disillusioned Downcast Forlorn, Glum Cheerless Melancholy	Down Disappointed Blue Discouraged Low Somber Sorry Unhappy
	WEAK	Ashamed Exhausted Powerless Anemic Decrepit Frail, Useless Depleted	Vulnerable Inept, Fragile Inadequate Worn out Helpless, Spent Run down Sluggish	Unable Tired Limp, Soft Weary Feeble Wimpy Ineffective

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INTENSITY		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
	HAPPY	Excited Thrilled Ecstatic Elated Intoxicated Captivated Euphoric Joyous Jubilant Overjoyed	Cheerful Optimistic Upbeat Enthusiastic Lively Joyful, Peppy Gleeful Delighted Tickled Hopeful	Merry Light Jolly, Up Glad Blissful Pleased Chipper Content Perky Playful
	STRONG	Powerful Potent, Fearless Forceful, Mighty Emphatically Active, Vigorous Unyielding	Confident Tough, Robust Brave, Sound Daring Hardy Hefty	Capable Adequate Firm, Able Assured Steady Stable, Solid

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