Different Voices on Emotional Intelligence Skills of the Good Teacher: Teachers, Students and Parents

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Abstract

In the quest of what makes a good teacher, researchers have used many different conceptions and contexts. Given the emotional and relational nature of the teaching profession, in our study we aimed to identify the emotional intelligence (EI) skills attributed to the Good Teacher. Trying to reach the core skills of the Good Teacher we asked multiple informants (i.e., teachers, students and parents) what EI skills they consider as the most important for the good teachers and looked for any variation in their perceptions. A total of 290 participants (136 teachers, 84 students, 70 parents) filled in a 20-item inventory which was based on Goleman's (2001, 2002) EI model. According to the total sample's report, the most important EI skills of the Good Teacher are trustworthiness, self-control, conscientiousness, communication and cooperation abilities, and the five least important are organizational awareness, initiative, achievement orientation, building bonds, change catalyst. Evaluations of teachers and parents were very similar, but students' significantly differed. In other words, adult participants gave higher ratings of the important EI skills of the Good Teacher compared to the young participants. Nevertheless, the ranking of the EI skills was, to a great extent, similar across the three groups.

Keywords: Good Teacher, emotional intelligence, social and emotional skills, multiple informants

1. Introduction

Students' holistic development (i.e., cognitive, social, emotional) is among the most critical demands placed on teachers (Khan, Yusoff, & Khan, 2014), particularly in the contemporary educational context (Tengku Ariffin, Bush, & Nordin, 2018). In their attempt to make both the in-service teachers' job and the pre-service teachers' education more effective, researchers and educators have systematically sought to identify the characteristics of the Good Teacher. Through decades many lists and taxonomies have emerged for describing the qualities of the Good Teacher. Nevertheless, a comprehensive description of the characteristics of the Good Teacher remains a far from easy task, partly due to the multiple connotations of the term “Good Teacher”. In relevant literature the “effective teacher”, the “excellent teacher”, the “ideal teacher” and the “good teacher” are overlapping constructs referring to the successful and competent teacher. In the present study, we opted for the term Good Teacher to denote all the above.

Overall, relevant research concludes that the concept of being a Good (effective, successful, excellent, ideal) Teacher embraces professional skills and personality traits that fall into two categories (Beishuizen, Hof, van Putten, Bouwmeester, & Asscher, 2001; Vollmer & Creek, 1988): teaching skills, including academic knowledge and classroom management competences (Wragg & Wood, 1984), and affective qualities, such as having good interpersonal skills, being able to motivate students and establish a good relationship with them (Koç, 2013; Miller, 1987; Uitto, Lutovac, Jokikokko, & Kaasila, 2018; Vollmer & Creek, 1988). In particular, given the social and emotional nature of teaching (Hansen, 1998; Hargreaves, 1998; Jennings, 2007; Kelchtermans, 2009), a substantial body of research has been produced regarding the latter category, which pertains to the affective characteristics and the emotional and social skills of good teachers (e.g., Koç, 2013; Miller, 1987; Uitto et al., 2018; Vollmer & Creek, 1988).

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As the literature review reveals, the majority of the studies exploring the Good Teacher exemplar focus on students’ evaluations (e.g., Aksoy, 1998; Beishuizen et al., 2001; Giscale & Vlad, 2014). Studies that examine multiple informants’ perspectives (i.e., of teachers, parents, students) of the characteristics of the Good Teacher are rare (e.g., Liu & Meng, 2009; Plavšić & Diković, 2016) and almost null when limited to the emotional and social characteristics of the Good Teacher. Taken these into account, the present study explores how teachers, students and parents perceive the emotional and social-related qualities of the Good Teacher. As theoretical framework for the study of the affective characteristics and the emotional and social skills of good teachers we used the model of emotional intelligence proposed by Goleman (2001, 2006).

Such a multi-informant approach of the Good Teacher may be useful in improving communication among all the school community stakeholders and in conflict resolution, arisen in the school context; also, it may lead the designing of effective training programs for pre-service and in-service teachers.

2. Emotional intelligence

Over the past 35 years, various models have been proposed to expound how emotional intelligence can explain or contribute to successful performance in the workplace. In summary, emotionally intelligent is a person who successfully manages personal, social and environmental changes, confronts reality with realism and flexibility, solves problems and takes decisions. In order to make this possible, it is imperative that the individual is able to manage his/her feelings to act for his/her benefit rather than against him/her, while s/he remains optimistic, positive and self-propelled (Bar-On, 2006).

Goleman (1998) considers emotional intelligence as the foundation as well as the result of outstanding work performance. He argues that emotional intelligence can be taught, as its emotional and social component dimensions are not inherent talents but skills that can be learnt and traits that can be developed (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKe, 2002). In the model he proposed (Goleman, 2001), emotional intelligence includes a wide array of self-focused and others-focused competencies and skills that promote individuals’ ability to identify, understand and manage their own emotions and that of others (see Table 1). The competencies and skills described in the model are embedded in the broad clusters of awareness and management of emotions and refer to the personal (self-focused) or the social (others-focused) dimension. As stated by Boyatzis, Goleman and Rhee (2000, p. 344), EI is observed “when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation”.

In a latest version of his model, Goleman (2006) has relabeled the self-focused clusters emotional intelligence competence and the others-focused clusters social intelligence competence. This integrated concept of emotional and social intelligence provides an expedient framework for describing human dispositions, competencies and skills and linking them to action and job performance. In this framework, the behavioral manifestations of the intrapersonal awareness and management of emotions within the self are differentiated from the behavioral manifestations of the interpersonal awareness and management of others’ emotions (Seal, Boyatzis, & Bailey, 2006).

| Table 1: Goleman’s emotional (and social) intelligence model |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Self-focused Emotional Intelligence**^1 | **Others-focused Social Intelligence**^1 |
| **Self awareness** | **Social awareness** |
| Emotional self awareness | Empathy |
| Accurate self assessment | Organizational awareness |
| Self confidence | Service orientation |
| **Self management** | **Relationship management** |
| Emotional self-control | Developing others |
| Adaptability | Influence |
| Achievement orientation | Conflict management |
| Initiative | Inspirational leadership |
| Optimism^1 | Change catalyst |
| Trustworthiness^2 => Transparency^1 | Teamwork and collaboration |
| Consciousness^2 => Optimism^1 | Communication^2 |
| | Building bonds ^2 |

Note: ^1 These terms have been added in the revised model of Goleman (2006).

^2 These skills have been deleted or replaced in the revised model presented by Goleman et al. (2002).
2.1. Emotional and social qualities of the Good Teacher

It is widely accepted that underneath crucial abilities of successful teachers lies a variety of affective characteristics, such as establishing positive relations with the students and showing interest in learners (Miller, 1987). Over time, the role of teacher’s emotional and social characteristics and skills in effective teaching and schooling has become the focus of an increasing research interest; the main findings of relevant research are summarized in this section. Most of the emotional and social qualities described in the following embed in the framework of emotional intelligence as described by many researchers (e.g., Bar-On, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), including Goleman (2001, 2006).

Many empirical studies consent that the leading emotional and social qualities of successful teachers include: having emotional strength, vitality (or willingness) and thoughtfulness (or friendly behaviors) (Khalil & Accariya, 2016; Tengku Ariffin et al., 2018); to accurately handle inappropriate student behavior, create and manage a stimulating competitive environment and maintain a focused group work (Koç, 2013; Luckner & Pianta, 2011); to be good listeners, explain things clearly in the class and help students learn a lot (Khalil & Accariya, 2016; Tengku Ariffin et al., 2018; Wragg & Wood, 1984); to be able to motivate the students (e.g., by giving them more control over the learning process, or by using positive feedback and praise) (Burnett, 2002; Luckner & Pianta, 2011; Schweinle, Meyer & Turner, 2006); to exhibit emotional and social skills and personality traits such as to be sensitive, concerned, attentive, understanding, encouraging, and supportive (Khalil & Accariya, 2016; Tengku Ariffin et al., 2018); to be brave, honest, and affectionate, to demonstrate self-respect, self-awareness, individual responsibility, imagination, improvisation skills (Khalil & Accariya, 2016; Tengku Ariffin et al., 2018); to be understanding, fun and loving (Thomas & Montgomery, 1998).

Moreover, it was found that students expect Good Teachers to be warm and patient, kind-hearted and modest, take a personal interest in their students (Koç, 2013), give the students opportunities to speak and take initiative, be open to criticism from their students, involve their students in activities, and invest effort to communicate with the students’ parents (Khalil & Accariya, 2016). Another characteristic of a Good Teacher that students have mentioned is leadership ability, which aids the teacher in arousing students’ curiosity, presenting them with challenges and sparking in them the desire to expand their knowledge. Such personality traits enable the development of a personal relationship between students and teachers in which teachers are transformed into mentors, a term coined by ancient Greeks, who strive to stabilize the identity, worldview, and life values of their student (Khalil & Accariya, 2016).

Good Teachers affect not only their students but also their colleagues and the school community. In addition to - or as result of - their personal emotional and social competencies, quite often they are exemplary in delivering effective classroom management. Thus, either by appointment or informally, Good Teachers often become mentors for other teachers, especially newcomers (Tengku Ariffin et al., 2018). This implies that they are able to communicate effectively as they share their knowledge, skills and experience with other teachers, students and other stakeholders within and across the school community (Hutchings, Bywater, Williams, Shakespeare, & Whitaker, 2009).

Platsidou & Mastorodimou (2009) asked 201 former students (now adults) to describe the best teacher they recall from their school years, with the aim to identify the critical skills and traits of the Good Teacher. An improvised inventory based on Bar-On’s (2006) model of emotional-social intelligence was used to obtain participants’ evaluations on 63 emotional and social skills of their favorite teacher. After factor analyzing the inventory, five factors were extracted which roughly corresponded to the emotional-social intelligence components described by Bar-On. According to respondents’ reports, the leading emotional and social skills of the Good Teachers are to be able to cope with problems (reality testing), to exhibit self-control, impartiality (being fair to every student) and empathy and to maintain good interpersonal relations.

In addition, participants were asked to evaluate their favourite teacher’s academic/professional skills (ability to carry their message across while teaching, getting students involved, expertise of their subject etc.). Interestingly, participants scored the teaching skills of their preferred teacher higher than his/her emotional and social skills. In other words, at least in a retrospective standpoint, former students assess teaching ability and field knowledge as more important qualities of the Good Teacher than the affective traits and skills. This is rarely found when current students are asked to evaluate their teachers; depending on their age, they usually rate the emotional and social qualities of their teachers as equally or more important than their teaching skills.

In a recent study, Raufelder et al. (2016) explored how adolescent students perceive “good” and “bad” teachers based on their daily school experiences. They interviewed with 86 seventh and eighth graders from German secondary schools.
Thematic analysis was used to extract themes and subthemes that describe the students’ perception of “good” and “bad” teachers. The results showed that students valued teachers’ interpersonal dimensions (appreciation, individual consideration, sympathy) over academic ones (motivation, comprehensive teaching, variety/flexibility during class), although they underlined their bilateral association. Furthermore, teacher’s personal characteristics (assertiveness, humor, empathy) were included in their description of the Good Teacher but they were not prioritized over interpersonal or academic dimensions. According to the authors, this is attributed to the increased focus on academic outcomes by the secondary school students, while it is possible that elementary school students value the (inter)personal dimensions over the academic ones.

The recent work of Uitto, et al. (2018) stresses further the critical role of emotions in the teaching profession. All the life-changing teachers recalled by the participants in this study had managed to establish strong emotional bonds with their students, made their students feel important and cared, and were truly empathetic and sensitive to their students’ emotions and concerns. It seems that life-changing teachers are willing to “walk the extra mile” and take many different roles (e.g., parent, advisor) when needed. These characteristics resulted in a “profound socio-emotional involvement in their students’ lives” (Uitto et al., 2018, p. 53).

2.2. Different voices on the Good Teacher’s emotional intelligence skills

Although vital contributors of the educational process, context and outcomes, teachers, students and parents may have a differentiated perspective on educational issues. As multiple informants, teachers, students and parents are affected by cultural, societal and contextual perceptions, norms and values regarding the Good Teacher exemplar (Arnon & Reichel, 2009; Bannink & Van Dam, 2007). However, empirical findings related to how multiple informants perceive the qualities of the Good Teacher are scarce (Liu & Meng, 2009), and even more so for parents. Given their distinct roles in the educational context and the different expectations they may have for themselves or the other parts of the triad, it is possible that teachers, students and parents may have different perceptions of the EI-related qualities of the Good Teacher.

The present study aims to provide relevant data hoping that this will contribute to the optimization of the learning process. If teachers are aware of what the students and the parents expect from them, in terms of social and emotional skills and behaviors, they would be more successful in meeting the students’ and parents’ needs; moreover, effective teaching as well as a better understanding of the teaching profession would be achieved (Koç, 2013). In this context, the different “voices” of teachers, students and parents are valuable in providing insights to what a Good Teacher is (Koç, 2013).

3. Aim of the Study & Research Questions

The aim of our study was to identify the emotional and social competencies and skills attributed to the Good Teacher by multiple informants. In other words, triangulation was employed to check the consistency of the Good Teacher paradigm as perceived by teachers themselves, students and parents. To this end, we used Goleman’s (2001, 2006) model of emotional intelligence as a theoretical framework for obtaining participants assessments.

In the present study, two research questions were investigated: (a) Which emotional and social skills do teachers, students and parents report as the most and the least important for the Good Teacher? (b) Are there any differences in the evaluations of the emotional and social skills of the Good Teacher among the three groups of participants?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

Data were obtained from three groups of participants: (a) teachers, (b) students and (c) parents. The first group consisted of 136 teachers (aged \(M = 44.7\) years, \(SD = 8.40\), 37 males (27.2%) and 99 females (72.8%). The second group included 84 students aged 13-19 years (\(M =16.52, SD = 1.81\)); 58% were males and 42% were females. The third group included 70 parents, aged 32-58 years (\(M = 46.31, SD = 5.54\), 37.1% males and 62.9% females. All together there were 271 participants.

4.2. Measures

A 20-item inventory was designed for the needs of this study. The items corresponded to the 20 emotional and social skills included in Goleman’s (2001, 2002) model of emotional intelligence (depicted in Table 1). Each item briefly described one of these skills (e.g., Self-control: Manages the impulsive and stressful feelings and maintains clear thinking even under pressure), and participants were asked to rate how important they consider that skill for the “Good Teacher” using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 5 = very important).
4.3. Procedure

All participants were contacted in person by the researchers either at school or at their private space. They all provided an informed consent to participate in the study voluntarily and no extra credits or incentives were given. On average, completing the questionnaire took about 5 minutes.

4.4. Data analysis

After having checked for the internal consistency of the inventory using the Cronbach’s α, the means and standard deviations were calculated to display which emotional intelligence skills were estimated as the most important. Then, analysis of variance was performed to check for differences between the three groups of participants.

5. Results

5.1. The most and the least important EI skills of the Good Teacher

Internal consistency indexes of the inventory were found very satisfactory for the total sample of participants (α = .89) as well as for each of the three groups (teachers α = .90, students α = .82 and parents α = .92). Table 2 presents the means of participants’ evaluations of the EI skills of the Good Teacher. According to the total sample of participants report, the top-five important EI skills of the Good Teacher are trustworthiness, self-control, consciousness, communication and cooperation abilities. The five least important EI skills are organizational awareness, initiative, achievement orientation, building bonds and change catalyst.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of participants’ evaluations of the EI skills of the Good Teacher (in descending order)

| EI skills                        | M    | S.D.  |
|---------------------------------|------|-------|
| Trustworthiness                 | 4.52 | 0.775 |
| Self-control                    | 4.52 | 0.760 |
| Conscientiousness               | 4.47 | 0.750 |
| Communication                   | 4.40 | 0.824 |
| Teamwork & Collaboration        | 4.33 | 0.766 |
| Conflict management             | 4.26 | 0.826 |
| Empathy                         | 4.25 | 0.836 |
| Developing others               | 4.20 | 0.793 |
| Accurate self-assessment        | 4.19 | 0.743 |
| Service orientation             | 4.17 | 0.796 |
| Self-confidence                 | 4.16 | 0.851 |
| Adaptability                    | 4.11 | 0.816 |
| Influence                       | 4.02 | 0.867 |
| Inspirational/ Visionary leadership | 4.02 | 0.901 |
| Emotional self-awareness        | 3.99 | 0.796 |
| Organizational awareness        | 3.96 | 0.869 |
| Initiative                      | 3.95 | 0.872 |
| Achievement orientation         | 3.93 | 0.776 |
| Building bonds                  | 3.79 | 0.974 |
| Change catalyst                 | 3.74 | 0.954 |

5.2. Differences among the three groups of participants

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the evaluations of all EI skills, bar the skills of initiative and service orientation, were significantly different across the three groups of participants (as shown in Table 3). Overall, post hoc multiple comparisons performed with the Bonferroni test showed that the evaluations of teachers and parents were very similar, but students’ evaluations were significantly lower than the evaluations of the former two groups. In other words, adult participants gave higher ratings of the important EI skills of the Good Teacher compared to the young participants. It is worth noting that the ranking of the EI skills was, to a great extent, similar across the three groups.
The aim of this study was to assess the emotional and social skills attributed to the Good Teacher by teachers, students, and parents. Goleman’s (2001, 2006) theory of emotional intelligence was used as the foundation of the measurement. Taking into account that a multi-informant approach of the Good Teacher has been scarcely examined in the relative literature, the present study revealed some very interesting findings.

Table 4 presents the top 10 EI skills which were identified by all groups of participants as the most important for the Good Teacher exemplar. Inspection of Table 4 suggests that participants’ ranking of the most important EI skills extensively converge: a set of seven skills was included in the 10 most important EI skills, although in a different order (i.e., trustworthiness, self-control, consciousness, communication, teamwork and collaboration, conflict management, empathy). Another set of three EI skills (i.e., accurate self-assessment, self-confidence and developing others) was reported among the 10 most important EI skills by two groups of participants, again in varied ranking. This indicates that there is significant agreement among teachers, students, and parents on which EI skills are the most important for the Good Teacher. It is interesting to note that the three skills reported as the most important by all groups (i.e., conscientiousness, trustworthiness and self-control) may be considered as alternative terms for the same concept (Jacobs, 2001). This strengthens even more the observed consensus of the multiple informants concerning the critical EI skills of the Good Teacher.

Many researchers (Khalil & Accariya, 2016; Loughran & Berry, 2005; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Uitto et al., 2018) have stated that, on the personal-emotional side, good teachers have the attributes of good parents: they are sensitive, concerned, attentive, aware of their students’ personal problems, understanding, encouraging, and supportive; as regards their personal socio-emotional characteristics, they are brave, honest, and affectionate, and demonstrate self-respect, self-awareness, individual responsibility, imagination, improvisation skills, and a sense of humor. Such personality traits enable the development of a personal relationship between students and teachers, allowing the teachers to get closer to the students; as a result, they may prevent negative behaviors, boost their students’ confidence, reinforce their strengths, and support their weak points. In a relationship like this, teachers are transformed into mentors-educators who strive to stabilize the identity, worldview and life values of their students (Tengku Ariffin et al., 2018). Our findings suggest that, to be able to impersonate the Good Teacher paradigm, one should be able to exhibit EI skills such as those that the multiple informants have prioritized, and mostly conscientiousness, trustworthiness and self-control.
Table 4: Ranking of the first 10 EI skills of the Good Teacher across the three groups of participants

| Rank | Teachers          | Students                      | Parents                       |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1st  | Conscientiousness | Trustworthiness                | Trustworthiness                |
| 2nd  | Self-control      | Self-control                  | Self-control                  |
| 3rd  | Trustworthiness   | Conscientiousness             | Teamwork & collaboration       |
| 4th  | Communication     | Communication                 | Conscientiousness             |
| 5th  | Conflict management | Teamwork & collaboration   | Communication                 |
| 6th  | Teamwork & collaboration | Service orientation          | Developing others             |
| 7th  | Empathy           | Developing others             | Empathy                       |
| 8th  | Self-confidence   | Empathy                       | Self-confidence               |
| 9th  | Accurate self-assessment | Accurate self-assessment   | Visionary leadership         |
| 10th | Adaptability      | Conflict management           | Conflict management           |

On the bottom of the ranking, the EI skills that all informants have reported as the least important for the Good Teacher are organizational awareness, initiative, achievement orientation, building bonds, and change catalyst. This finding broadly reflects the Greek (and maybe also the international) status of the public education system in which teachers are limited to function within defined guidelines and legislation. In this context, the EI skills that empower teachers’ leading role among their peers (such as organizational awareness, initiative, building bonds, change catalyst) are attenuated. Interestingly, achievement orientation is also relegated, probably mirroring the fact that, within the limited jurisdiction of the public schools, the teachers who are highly motivated to achievement cannot find sufficient outlets to satisfy this need. For example, in the Greek context, opportunities for promotion are very limited, thus, teachers with high achievement orientation are demotivated.

In addition, the study aimed at testing whether multiple informants perceive similarly/differently the emotional and social skills of the Good Teacher. First, their evaluation scores of the most important EI skills are examined. Comparisons between the three groups revealed that the evaluation scores of teachers and parents were very similar, but students’ evaluation scores of almost all the EI skills were significantly lower than the scores of the former two groups. In other words, adult informants gave higher ratings of the important EI skills of the Good Teacher compared to the young participants. This may be attributed to the long experience of teaching and work demands that adults share, as current professionals and/or former students, which makes them highly value the EI qualifications of a teacher. Students, on the other hand, have been more cautious in their evaluations. Second, we found that the ranking of the EI skills of a Good Teacher was, to a great extent, similar across the three groups of informants. Although thriftier in their scoring, students ranked the EI qualifications of the Good Teacher very similar to how parents and teachers did. This finding suggests that the major stakeholders of the school community share a common perspective of the emotional and social characteristics a Good Teacher should exhibit.

6.1. Educational implications

In conclusion, this study has revealed a notable consensus among teachers, students, and parents concerning the social and emotional skills of the Good Teacher. Broad historical and cultural influences seem to produce a strong, stable view on the EI qualities of the Good Teacher. In such a multi-informant perspective of the Good Teacher, personal traits seem to hold the leading roles. These findings mean that the learning progress is optimized when teachers, students, and parents can build a relationship that balances their roles and expectations of the Good Teacher (Raufelder, 2007, as cited in Raufelder et al., 2016). Since teachers have a major impact on both students’ academic and personal development, the establishment and maintenance of a positive teacher–student relationship, including both academic and (inter-) personal dimensions, should become a primary goal for all educational establishments (Raufelder et al., 2016).

Moreover, the present findings have direct implications for teachers training. Positive effects of training in emotional intelligence have been reported by various studies, regardless of design (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019); so teachers can benefit from educational programs and interventions aimed at enhancing their EI skills. Darling-
Hammond (2006) suggests that it should be a coherent system that can provide well-trained teachers in all communities. To do that, there should be standards of teacher qualities that all teacher training institution should follow. Alongside the knowledge, expertise and teaching skills, trained qualities should also include emotional and social traits and skills, such as those indentified by this multi-informant outlook, that enhance the pedagogical perspective in teaching. Should this happen, it is likely that teachers-students everyday classroom interactions will become more personal and intimate; also, it will help teachers serve as individual role models or as mentors to their students (Raufelder et al., 2016).

Finally, in future research, this study may help create a tool to measure EI skills of the Good Teacher. It would be very useful to obtain a valid means of evaluating teachers’ emotional and social qualities based on a commonly accepted framework which could be used for education and evaluation purposes, in pre-service and in-service teachers.

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