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## DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE – AN EXPERIENTIALIST APPROACH

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**Abstract:** *The present paper started from the following general hypothesis: the experiential methods and techniques which are being used within the personal optimization group lead to the development of emotional abilities in Psychology students.*

*An experiential group for personal optimization of 30 Psychology students was involved (with a frequency of 15 h/weekend every 2 months for 3 semesters), control group being composed also from 30 Psychology student.*

*The preliminary results show that students from experimental group improve their self awareness, empathy, motivation, social abilities, and self-regulation, as components of emotional intelligence, during the experiential group for personal optimization. Their development of emotional abilities has an influence on the improvement of their own didactic behaviour and professional success.*

**Keywords:** *emotional intelligence, empathy, motivation, self-regulation, self-awareness, social abilities.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

We cross a period of continuous changes that require those personal competences that are found in one of the newest concepts from psychology – *emotional intelligence (EQ)*. Defined as awareness, understanding and expression of emotions, EQ together with cognitive intelligence help a person to adapt easier to situations and experiences from personal and professional life.

Emotional intelligence represents a bridge between emotions and cognition with emotions representing an important source of information that assist the individual in understanding and exploring social environment. It became a „cultural trend” [1] as it promises to contribute to a better solving of human problems such as the conflict between what a person thinks and she/ he feels. Researches involving emotional intelligence are more numerous and for this

subject specialists manifest more and more interest.

Emotional intelligence seems to be mostly nurtured and emotional knowledge can be developed. Studies showed that people increase their EQ along the years as they learn how to manage their impulses, how to motivate themselves and to show more empathy and social flexibility all of these meaning that they become more emotionally intelligent. [2]. As a consequence people are more understanding toward themselves and others, happier with their life, more efficient and appropriate co-workers. They benefit of a plus no matter the domain they activate in, professional, personal and even intimate relationships, EQ contributing to success in any domain.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1. Objective

The objective of the present study is the development of emotional intelligence of psychology students by enabling personal resources as a result of awareness and responsibility of their own life during the sessions of experiential training for personal optimization.

## 2.2. Hypotheses

### *General hypothesis*

Experiential methods and techniques used in the personal optimization training session lead to the development of emotional intelligence of psychology students.

### *Specific hypothesis*

1. Experiential programme determines the development of self-consciousness in students of experimental group versus control group.

2. Students in the experimental group, following the experiential group intervention, have a greater capacity to regulate emotions than those in the control group.

3. The level of motivation development is higher in the experimental group compared to the control group following experiential group intervention.

4. Experiential group intervention facilitates the development of empathy in students of experimental group versus control group.

5. The level of social skill development for students in the experimental group is higher following experiential group intervention.

## 2.3. Assessment tools

Four tests were individually applied before and after experiential group intervention in order to assess the development of emotional intelligence and its components:

- Emotional intelligence test through behaviour measurement – TQE (Segal, 1997) [3];

- Emotional Intelligence Scale – EIS (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, Dornheim, 1998) [4];

- Emotional intelligence test – TIE (Goleman, 1995, adapted by Roco, 2001) [5];

- Battery of emotional intelligence profile – BTPIE (Wood, Tolley, 2003) [6].

## 2.4. Participants

60 psychology students were involved, with a mean age of 23.74 and 7.62 standard deviation, divided into two groups.

a. *The experimental group* - comprising 30 psychology students who participated to an experiential training of personal optimization focused on the development of the emotional intelligence and of its components (self-awareness, empathy, motivation, social skills and self-regulation). The training consisted of 12 meetings that took place over 18 months, totalizing between 96 and 120 hours.

b. *The control group* - statistically comparable (age, sex, level of development of emotional intelligence) consisting of 30 psychology students.

To respect the rules of professional ethics the written consent of each student participant has been demanded. The results are confidential and used only in the present study.

## 2.5. Techniques

In order to test the above hypothesis, we prepared a module design for development of emotional intelligence and based on principle from humanistic and experiential approaches. This orientation was selected because the accent is placed on self evolvment, interpersonal relationships, and experience of *here and now*. The students are allowed to become aware of self perceptions, their thoughts and emotions and to understand, transform and control them. The module encompass twelve sessions in which we planned to obtain group cohesion, to familiarised participants with experiential techniques, to facilitate self-awareness and interpersonal interaction and also to develop self-consciousness, empathy, motivation, self-regulation and social abilities [2].

Most of the exercises were centred on provoking the students to experience the *here and now* feeling in relation with different life situations and to practice constructive interrelation skills followed by deep personal analysis.

Some examples of exercises used in the intervention group are: „*Decoration of the doll*”, „*The story of the three faces*” „*The*



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*picture of my emotions*", „*The flying balloon*”, „*In the symbolic world*”, „*What are the books saying about me*”, „*The story of my family*”, „*We draw together*”, „*The story of the hands who become alive*”, „*The mirror room*”, „*The emotions puppet*”, „*The duet or the history of my becoming*”.

### 3. RESULTS

In order to test the efficiency of the intervention module centred on the development of emotional intelligence we compared the mean values for the component of emotional intelligence for the two groups (experimental and control group). There were used four tests, two of them multidimensional (BTPIE, and TQE) composed of factors that are component of emotional intelligence and

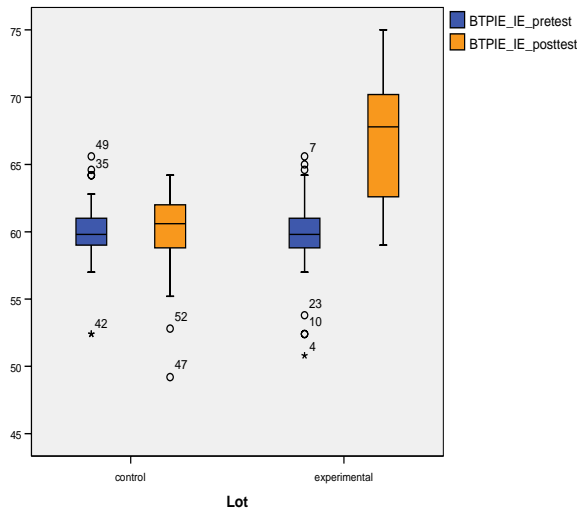
two test that measure a global score for emotional intelligence (TIE and EIS). The scored obtained by each of the component of emotional intelligence and the global score are bigger for the experimental group and smaller for the control group. The results are showed in table 3.1. Provoking exercises followed by a deep psychological analysis lead to the development of self consciousness ( $t_{(58)} = 2,01$ ,  $p = 0,05$ ), an increased capacity to regulate their own emotions ( $t_{(58)} = 6,25$ ,  $p = 0,001$ ), and an increased motivation ( $t_{(58)} = 2,91$ ,  $p = 0,01$ ). The level of empathy also improved after experiential sessions ( $t_{(58)} = 7,88$ ,  $p = 0,001$ ). Students showed an improvement in their social abilities ( $t_{(58)} = 4,41$ ,  $p = 0,001$ ) - as a component of emotional intelligence in Wood and Tolley model. Emotional intelligence quotient as a global capacity improved in all the other measurement used and the results are also summarised in table 3.1.

**Tab. 3.1.** Comparison between means in the post-test for experimental and control group

Psychological tests	Mean ( $\sigma$ )		t	p
	Experimental group	Control group		
Self-consciousness BTPIE (Wood, Tolley, 2003)	89,67 (10,56)	84,50 (9,20)	2,01	0,05
Self-regulation – BTPIE (Wood, Tolley, 2003)	66,93 (6,88)	57,53 (4,51)	6,25	0,001
Motivation – BTPIE (Wood, Tolley, 2003)	65,60 (5,88)	61,43 (5,15)	2,91	0,01
Empathy – BTPIE (Wood, Tolley, 2003)	72,47 (5,33)	62,33 (4,59)	7,88	0,001
Social abilities BTPIE (Wood, Tolley, 2003)	41,33 (4,91)	36,40 (3,64)	4,41	0,001
IE – BTPIE (Wood, Tolley, 2003)	66,93 (4,66)	60,06 (3,31)	6,56	0,001
IE – TIE (Goleman, 1995, adapted by Roco, 2001)	109,50 (22,33)	86,33 (23,45)	3,91	0,001
Emotional consciousness – TQE (Segal, 1997)	1,93 (0,58)	1,50 (0,86)	2,28	0,05

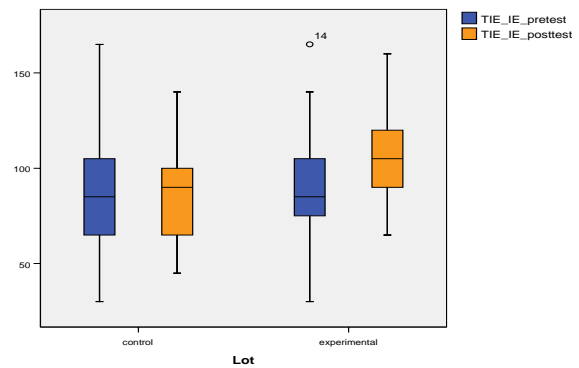
<b>Acceptance of emotions – TQE (Segal, 1997)</b>	2,07 (0,74)	1,43 (0,77)	3,24	0,01
<b>Active awareness of emotions – TQE (Segal, 1997)</b>	2,63 (0,92)	2,07 (0,98)	2,29	0,05
<b>Empathy– TQE (Segal, 1997)</b>	2,23 (0,62)	1,50 (0,82)	3,89	0,001
<b>IE – TQE (Segal, 1997)</b>	8,87 (1,92)	6,43 (1,96)	4,85	0,001
<b>IE – EIS (Schutte et al. 1998)</b>	129,60 (11,78)	122,47 (10,27)	2,49	0,05

The level of development for emotional intelligence measured by Wood and Tolley battery (BTPIE) for the experimental group has a value of 66,93 (presented in the right side of the imagine pre and post intervention) compared with 60,06 for the control group (presented in the left side of the image, first and second testing) ( $t_{(58)} = 6,56, p = 0,001$ ) – figure 3.1.



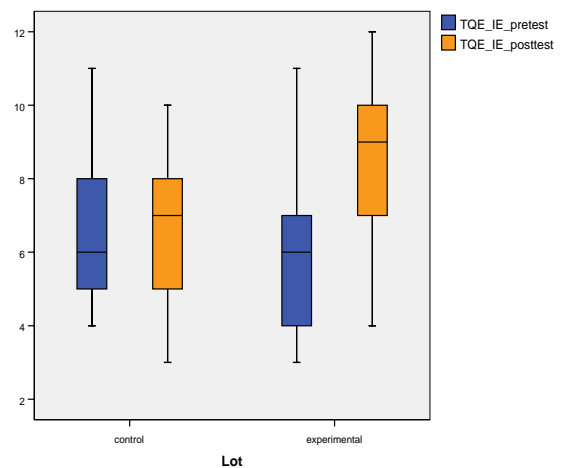
**Fig. 3.1.** The influence of the experiential intervention on the level of emotional intelligence tested by BTPIE battery

Emotional intelligence quotient obtained by the experimental group at the test for emotional intelligence proposed by Goleman and adapted by Roco – TIE has a value of 109,50 compared with 86,33 for the control group ( $t_{(58)} = 3,91, p = 0,001$ ). The values for the control group are depicted in the left side of the image and for the experimental group in the right side, for the two moments of the testing (pre and post intervention) – figure 3.2.



**Fig. 3.2** The influence of the experiential intervention on the level of emotional intelligence tested by TIE

The next test measured EQ using behaviour description and was proposed by Segal in 1997 – TQE. Experimental group obtained bigger values of the total score after intervention (8,87 points) compared with control group (6,43 points) -  $t_{(58)} = 4,85, p = 0,001$ . Figure 3.3. illustrates the difference between the two groups.



**Fig. 3.3.** The influence of the experiential intervention on the level of emotional intelligence tested by TQE

Another global measurement for the emotional intelligence is the one proposed by



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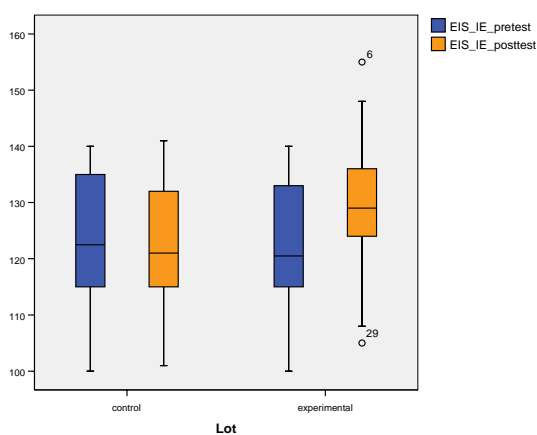
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Shutte and co-workers – EIS. At this test the students from the experimental group obtained a score of 129,60 compared with 122,47 received by the students from the control group ( $t_{(58)} = 2,49, p = 0,05$ ). The values are presented in figure 3.4.



**Fig. 3.4.** The influence of the experiential intervention on the level of emotional intelligence tested by EIS

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In experiential training of personal optimization it was aimed to optimize the psychology students' development of emotional intelligence by activating personal resources, by discovering new patterns of effective interaction, by becoming aware and responsible of their own life. The statistical results obtained support the assertion that experiential group intervention determines the development of emotional intelligence and its components - self-awareness, empathy, self regulation, motivation and social skills. Psychology students included in the experimental group improved the level of development of their emotional intelligence assessed with all four psychological tests:

Battery of emotional intelligence profile – BTPIE, Emotional intelligence test – TIE, Emotional intelligence test through behaviour measurement – TQE and Emotional Intelligence Scale – EIS.

Using the control group in the experimental design emphasized the beneficial effects of experiential training sessions especially that in post test there were confirmed statistically significant differences between the results obtained by students in this group and those in the experimental group.

Also, experiential group members have achieved superior results for each component of emotional intelligence, which entitles us to characterize them as being able:

- to identify and express their emotions, to adopt a positive attitude, to be honest with themselves and to respect themselves avoiding to focus only on logic and reason;
- to manage their own emotions and impulses, to be more flexible, detached by problems and to express emotions in an assertive manner;
- to channel their desire and striving to evolve and to achieve set goals, to take initiative and to maintain positive attitude towards the challenges of life;
- to identify and accept others' feelings, to participate in their emotional issues, to relate to others' feelings and needs without sacrificing their own emotional experience;
- to initiate, to develop and maintain quality and constructive interpersonal relationships, to communicate and collaborate effectively in group activities.

Methods and techniques of art therapy, gestalt-therapy and drama therapy challenged the psychology students involved to experience "here and now" various life situations and thus to realize their own perceptions, thoughts, emotions, feelings, fears, blockages and vulnerabilities, and then,

to deliberately assume them, to transform them through re-significance and take control over them and over their own person. Provoking exercises led them to know themselves and the others better, to understand and accept that each person is unique precisely because he has both qualities and faults. They also became aware of the feeling that they belong to the group, that their difficulties may be common to others and that it is important to adopt an attitude of trust and mutual support. The experiential group stimulated the students to discover their own way to cope with life challenges as effectively as possible and get the chance to negotiate with themselves, to forgive and accept, to foster, assess, observe, and gratify themselves in a conscious and responsible way.

In and through meeting with themselves and with others, psychology students activated their resources and re-channelled locked energies on a course of creative and always flexible personal and professional development based on free choices and accountability. Acquisitions took place both during exercises and as a result of intensive personal analysis focused on the following themes: emotional immaturity and dependence, separation anxiety and abandonment, fear of rejection and failure, self rejection and low self esteem, lack of authenticity, conduct of over adaptation, aggressiveness and fear of authority, confusing relationships and lack of border in relations with parental figures, "family loyalty" and family myths, hostility and repressed anger towards others, intolerance to frustration and possessiveness, anxiety and mistrust of others.

The assessment, conducted by psychology students, on significant effects arising from their participation in experiential group is meant to highlight the considerations above.

In the next lines present the saying of one of the participants:

*„Throughout the group meeting I started to discover the value of Socratic thinking. Analyses that I was part in and diverse techniques helped me to understand conflict and tensions that I buried inside of me and free energies that I believe I can have.*

*Actually I discovered that even if I believed I can swim only now I learned the correct movements. But first I had to forget or to correct the old movements. I discover that the entire burden covered under projections, introjections, transfers were in fact slowing my development. Was it meaningful that I referred to myself in rather masculine form not feminine? What consequences had the fact that I clarified my sex-role in the family? What about the integration of my femininity? All of these are rhetoric questions. Now I know to listen to people without judging them. The empathy that I inherited and that always helped me to come closer to people is not stopping me to say NO when I realised the danger of becoming a permanent „helper”. Now I finally discover the benefits of being a wife and a mother without forgetting that I am a woman too.” (Daria)*

The training of personal optimization focused on the development of students' emotional intelligence is valid and supports the vision of a new educational paradigm described in volume led by Laurențiu Mitrofan (2007) [7]. Moreover, it can be extended, adapted and tested in schools for parents, especially in teachers' of all specializations and school psychologists' initial and continuous training.

This research, beyond its contributions and limits, *is intended to be an invitation from soul, to teachers, present and future, to reflect on the importance of developing their own emotional intelligence and work with himself* in order to *obtain self achievement of the human potential, personal self perfection, to win creativity, authenticity and spontaneity so much needed when training sociable, creative, happy, free and intelligent children and young people* [8].

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