

RESEARCH ABSTRACTS

Teachers' Emotional Intelligence as a Predisposition for Discrimination against Students with Severe Emotional and Behavioural Disorders

Students with Emotional Behavioural Disorders (EBD) are among the most challenging students to teach. Personality Trait Theory predicts teachers' level of Emotional Intelligence (EI) would affect their cognitive-affective-behavioural reactions towards students with EBDs, and influence level of academic achievement and difficult behaviour of these students. This research explores which teachers are more predisposed to discriminate against EBD students, and identifies the most 'effective', supportive EI teacher traits. Underlying psychological processes, such as genetic EI make-up of teachers, may prove to be most valuable in determining whether more practical strategies for dealing with students' behaviour/emotions are effectively applied and successful. An Attribution Model framework helped assess teacher reactions towards students.

Two hundred and sixty one teachers from 51 Victorian schools participated in the study by completing self-report questionnaires, including the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. A quantitative survey methodology used vignettes, with each school contact person randomly giving 50/50 surveys to their teachers (depicting a student with either mild or severe EBD symptoms).

Pathway analysis revealed that teachers with higher EI reported less stigmatising and punitive intentions and likely greater helping behaviours. A new EI Process Model of Stigmatisation was proposed to measure teacher reactions through an affective-cognitive-behavioural sequence, rather than a cognitive-affective-behavioural sequence. Teachers' EI levels also related to their own levels of psychological distress and/or compassion stress, which influenced likely helping or punitive outcomes. Despite behavioural severity of EBD students, teachers higher in EI still indicate more supportive helping behaviours.

Specifically-identified 'ideal' teacher EI traits should lead to greater helping and be psychologically beneficial to both students and teachers. These results assisted development of an assessment tool (ASET – Assessment Screen for Emotionally Intelligent Teachers), which lays a sound foundation for schools and others to profile or recruit teachers with best 'qualities' to effectively teach students EBD students.

An Attributional Analyses of Stigmatisation towards Students who have a Formal and Informal Label of Learning Disability.

The aim of this study was to determine whether children with 'learning disabilities' (LDs) should or should not be differentiated from children with 'learning difficulties' in the education system in Australia. This study challenged the general assumption that diagnostic labelling leads to stigmatisation and considered Riddick's (2000) claim that labels only encapsulate the stigma that already exists.

By drawing on the Attribution theory as a methodological framework (Corrigan et al., 2003), this study captured the perceptions, affect and likely helping behaviours of teachers towards students who do and do not have a formal label of LD. A quantitative survey experimental methodology was employed through the use of vignettes, which depicted a hypothetical student with a LD. Thirty four teachers from a rural private College in central Victoria were assigned to one of two vignette conditions for comparison (a Formal Label and Informal Label group). Only one group was informed that the student had a diagnosis of dyslexia.

Independent t-tests revealed that a LD label did not lead to increased stigmatisation or discrimination by teachers. Age and gender were better predictors of discrimination, as well as the perceived nature of the student's behaviours. This study demonstrated the positive effects of a LD label, or at least rejected and criticised the widely held claim regarding the negative effects of medical labelling.

More assessment, understanding and awareness of LDs could help teachers to sort through confusing student presentations, leading to greater educational opportunities and psychological well-being for students with LDs. This study was consistent with other attribution studies which claimed that helping behaviour can be determined by a cognitive-emotional process and it also added to the limited research on labelling and stigmatisation within an educational and psychological context. This study may have implications for cultural change strategies that seek to reduce inequality in the classroom.