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EMOTIONAL ABILITIES AMONG TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Many studies point to the significant role played by teachers' emotional abilities in promoting learning processes among pupils in schools. In addition, there is increasing awareness that these emotional abilities contribute to a pupil's personal and social development. Teachers contribute decisively to the development of these abilities within the educational framework. In addition to placing emphasis on developing academic abilities and imparting knowledge, they are required to create a supportive educational environment that enables inter- and intrapersonal emotional processes to take place. In order to maintain educational environments such as these and contribute to pupils' development of these abilities, the teacher will need to have a high level of self-efficacy and capacity for empathy. In the present study teachers from three school levels (early childhood, elementary and secondary school teachers) responded to both teacher self-efficacy and empathy questionnaires. Findings indicated that overall early childhood teachers exhibited higher levels of empathy and teacher self-efficacy than did both elementary and secondary school teachers. Interestingly, on the student engagement subscale secondary school teachers exhibited a higher level than did kindergarten and elementary school teachers. Our findings contribute to the growing body of literature emphasizing the significant role of emotional abilities in educational settings.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, educators, parents and public figures have increasingly called for investing efforts in developing curricula that would not only improve pupils' academic abilities but also their emotional and social abilities (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias & Siegle, 2004). These calls express findings showing that mental and emotional processes affect pupils' academic achievements (Cohen, 2006; Hoffman, 2009), learning of values, acquisition of social skills and personal development (Shoffner, 2009; Zembylas, 2007). This complex task falls primarily on the shoulders of teachers (Hargreaves, 2000). They are expected to teach, and at the same time to set the atmosphere in the classroom by developing supportive and inspiring relationships with their pupils (Hargreaves, 2000). In addition to an emphasis on developing academic abilities and on imparting knowledge, they are expected to create a supportive educational environment enabling inter-personal and intra-personal emotional processes to take place (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Classrooms that have a warm, understanding and caring atmosphere better prepare students to learn, and provide a safe environment in which students can

risk offering new ideas and even making mistakes, both critical for intellectual growth (Salami, 2007). Cooper, Brna, & Martins, (2000) argue that among young learners (5-8) a teacher's ability to understand the child is central to the child's learning process. Such understanding is dependent on the teacher's ability to empathize with his/her students in all their different circumstances. Only by developing a rich understanding of his/her pupils can the teacher properly enhance learning and meet varying learning needs. Further they suggest that "by targeting needs effectively and facilitating success for different pupils at different levels, the teacher builds crucial self-esteem, which enables children to take new risks in their understanding, allows them to modify their existing beliefs and creates the atmosphere in which rapid learning can take place" (Cooper et.al, 2000 pg. 24). Hamre and Pianta (2005) showed that the degree of conflict in the relationship with kindergarten teachers predicted children's grades, positive work habits, and disciplinary infractions in lower and upper elementary school, and for boys even in middle school. In a meta-analysis that examined the influence of affective teacher-student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement, findings suggested that affective teacher-student relationships were most influential in older students (adolescence), in children who were academically at risk, and in boys, rather than girls, in all ages

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(Roorda, Koomen, Spilt & Oort, 2011). Cornelius-White's (2007) added that the affective variables "empathy" and "warmth" in teachers were found to be more strongly associated with student outcomes than most other person-centered variables. Further studies indicated that caring teachers cultivate pupils' personal commitment and internal motivation by instructing pupils during situations of conflict, by fostering cooperation among the pupils, and by serving as role models for respectable and proper communication in society (Kemp & Reupert, 2012). These teachers are warm and supportive, imparting a feeling of belonging to the school environment among their pupils and a feeling of confidence in researching new ideas and examining unfamiliar situations; in this way, they help develop a basis for independent interpersonal learning (Intrator, 2006).

On the other hand, teachers lacking social and emotional abilities in coping with existing challenges in the classroom tend to undergo emotional stress, which adversely affects their ability to teach and eventually leads to burnout. This progression to burnout threatens the teacher-pupil relationship, classroom management and classroom atmosphere (Yeh, 2009). When teachers lack the resources to cope effectively with social and emotional challenges, their control over the pupils' emotions and behavior, as well as in their academic achievements, decreases. Under these conditions, teachers could overreact by inflicting punishment, which reflects a lack of self-control and could cause disturbances in the classroom (Yilmaz & Sahinkaya, 2010).

Another powerful variable that appears to be strongly associated with teacher's functioning and student's outcomes is a teacher's beliefs about his/her teaching abilities and confidence in being able to influence students' learning (Gibbs & Powell, 2012). Teacher's self-efficacy was found to be a predictor of motivation, high achievement, and a greater sense of learning self-efficacy in pupils. It was also found that teachers with a high level of self-efficacy tend to be more compassionate in their class management and encourage autonomy among their pupils, in contrast to teachers with a low level of self-efficacy, who tend to be more conservative in class management and insist on strict regulations and sanctions (Meijer & Foster, 1998).

Teacher self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to people's judgments of their own capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy beliefs influence task choice, effort, persistence, resilience, and achievement (Britner & Pajares, 2006). Self-efficacy is a future-oriented belief about the level of competence a person expects he or she will display in a given situation. High self-efficacy levels enable people to select challenging settings and explore their environment or create new ones. Thus, they represent a belief in one's own competence in dealing with a variety of demands, and can be characterized mainly as being competence-based, prospective, and action-related (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Teacher self-efficacy is the teachers' confidence in their own capacity to influence student learning, and is considered one of the key motivational notions influencing professional teachers' behavior and students' learning (Klassen, Tze, Betts &

Gordon, 2011). Studies reported by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2007) have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of teachers' self-efficacy and its association with a wide range of teaching and learning outcomes. These outcomes include teachers' classroom behaviors, their efforts and goal-setting, and their openness to new ideas and willingness to experiment with new methods. In addition, teachers' self-efficacy was shown to influence students' motivation, academic performance and achievements (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007). There is some evidence that teachers with low levels of self-efficacy may be more likely to use punitive or reactive disciplinary strategies as a means of behavior management (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke Spero, 2005). These teachers also experience greater difficulties in the profession, exhibit lower levels of job satisfaction, and higher levels of job-related stress, as compared with teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy (Betoret 2009).

Empathy among Teachers

Empathy is described in the literature as a moral feeling an individual has that relates to the well-being of others in interpersonal interactions and positively affects the involvement of people in social altruistic behavior (Keen, 2006). It is defined as an individual's ability to enter into the world of another individual from emotional, mental and behavioral aspects, and thereby establish an interaction based on understanding the emotions and thoughts of that individual (Constantine & Gainor, 2001). The meaning of empathy among teachers is the ability to express concern for pupils, to perceive situations from their point of view and to understand their feelings out of sympathy. The empathic response represents a significant part of teachers' work in which they exhibit positive behavior such as providing help and understanding others. In addition, it involves restraining aggressive and anti-social behavior (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007).

Cooper (2004) found that empathic teachers contribute to children's self-efficacy and to their motivation to learn. Empathic teachers possess high moral standards, succeed in communicating with their pupils, both emotionally and mentally, and encourage them to create the same kind of relationships with others (.). Such teachers serve as a model of morality for their pupils, by engaging them in positive interaction. This type of personal interaction helps to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, contributes to better behavior and fosters sharing (Tettegah & Andersen, 2007). Empathic teachers have also been shown to strengthen their pupils' sense of belonging to their schools, and their relationships with teachers and peers, and to boost their confidence in the school climate (Schutz & DeCuir, 2002).

Research studies dealing with early childhood point to a significant connection between the behavior of the educating figure and the empathic behavior of toddlers. When caregivers hugged children and treated them empathically, the children learned to act in a similar fashion among themselves (Davidov, Zahn-Waxler, Roth-Hanania, Knafo, 2013). Empathy is believed to be an inherent ability, which grows and develops under the influence of the environment (Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, van Hulle, Robinson, Rhee, 2008). Therefore, a teacher's role is crucial, particularly when dealing with

young children, since at this stage of their lives developing the ability of empathy will influence their social, moral and self-development behavior. By providing emotional guidance, explanations and suitable demonstrations, an atmosphere will develop of generosity, cooperation and concern for others within the educational framework (Howes, 2000). Despite the great importance of developing a teacher's emotional abilities, only very few teachers receive training in this area (Tadmor, 2009). Teacher training programs do not place much emphasis on developing the emotional ability of student teachers, and those coming to the field must cope with complex tasks and emotional situations intuitively and with considerable goodwill (Kaufhold & Johnson, 2005; Ming Lam, Kolomitro, Alamparambil, 2011).

Research Objective

In light of the increasing awareness of importance of emotional abilities among teachers, recent research studies show that empathic teachers who possess a high level of self-efficacy derive greater satisfaction from their educational work, thus contributing to the feelings, functioning and academic achievements of their pupils. The objective of this research study is to examine the levels of teachers' self-efficacy and empathy and the correlation between them. This study examined teachers within three educational frameworks – kindergarten, elementary school and secondary school – with the objective of expanding knowledge and understanding of empathy and self-efficacy within the three educational framework.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Tools

The quantitative data were collected using the following two questionnaires:

Empathy questionnaire

the Interpersonal Reactivity Index multidimensional empathy questionnaire (Davis, 1983) translated into Hebrew. The full questionnaire includes 28 closed statements divided into four subscales: perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern and personal distress. Each subscale is divided into seven statements, all of which are aspects of the overall concept of empathy. Two groups relate to cognitive empathy and two groups to emotional empathy. In the current research study and according to the objectives of the research study, one group from each area was chosen from this questionnaire.

In the cognitive field – the group of statements focused on perspective taking, that is, the ability to perceive another person's point of view. For example, "During a disagreement, I try to examine the side of each party involved before I reach my own decision."

In the emotional field – the group of statements describing empathic concern, that is, emotions directed at the other person, expressing sympathy and concern for others. For example, "I very often feel emotional tenderness and concern towards others whose situation is not as good as mine."

The respondent was required to assess the extent that each item described him on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = does not describe me at all and 5 = describes me very well. The validity of the tool examined in this research study: reliability was tested and α values were found to be between 0.62 and 0.76. In estimating reliability according to the division of items into groups, the following α values were found: perspective taking = 0.65 and empathic concern = 0.64. In this research study, the following α values were found: perspective taking = 0.72 and empathic concern = 0.54. In addition, according to Davis (1983), the overall grade of both components of the empathy questionnaire was also calculated and the inner reliability was found to be $\alpha = 0.72$.

Teacher self-Efficacy Questionnaire

The questionnaire to assess teacher self-efficacy was taken from research studies carried out by Friedman and Kass (2001). The questionnaire included 29 statements on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, whereby 1 = never and 5 = always. The questionnaire included three subscales in the area of teachers' self-efficacy:

Instructional strategies

A teacher's ability to perform educational, learning and social tasks related to the kindergarten/school and the children. For example, "I think that I am flexible in my teaching methods."

Classroom management

A teacher's feeling within the organization and the extent to which he/she feels has an influence on decision-making in the kindergarten/school. For example, "I feel that I contribute to the policy-making of the kindergarten/school and to its character."

Student engagement

A teacher's relationship with the children. For example, "I feel that the children respond willingly to my requests and instructions in the kindergarten/classroom."

Reliability was calculated for each subscale: instructional strategies, $\alpha = 0.70$; classroom management; and $\alpha = 0.72$; student engagement, $\alpha = 0.40$. In addition, the overall feeling of teachers' self-efficacy was calculated, and the inner reliability was found to be $\alpha = 0.75$.

Research Sample

A total of 149 teachers responded to the questionnaires: 69 (46.3%) kindergarten teachers, 37 (24.8%) elementary school teachers and 43 (28.9%) secondary school teachers. A total of 139 (93.3%) were women and 10 were men, all from central and northern Israel. A total of 94 (63.9%) of the participants had a B.Ed degree, 34 a B.A. degree and 53 an M.A. degree. The age of the participants ranged from 28 to 60 years, the mean being 43 (standard deviation of 7.1). The number of years of experience of the teachers ranged from 5 to 39, the mean being 17 (standard deviation of 8.0). The average number of pupils per class was 30 (standard deviation of 5.2) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of demographic variables according to educational framework

Variable	Entire Sample		Kindergarten		Elementary School		High School	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Educational framework								
High School	43	28.9						
Elementary School	37	24.8						
Kindergartens	69	46.3						
Gender								
Female	10	6.7	1	1.4	0	0	9	20.9
Male	139	93.3	68	98.6	37	100	34	79.1
Academic Degree								
BEd	60	40.8	48	71.6	11	29.7	1	2.3
BA	34	23.1	12	17.9	6	16.2	16	37.2
MA	53	36.1	7	10.5	20	54.1	26	60.5
Study Institute								
University	61	42.1	2	3.1	22	59.5	37	86.0
Academic College	84	57.9	63	96.9	15	40.5	6	14.0
Participated in advanced study program								
Yes	68	45.9	33	48.5	15	40.5	20	46.5
No	80	54.1	35	51.5	22	59.5	23	53.5
	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd
Age (years)	43.3	8.9	42.8	8.9	44.5	9.6	42.9	8.5
Teaching experience (years)	17.4	9.7	16.4	9.4	18.8	10.3	17.9	9.8
# Pupils in class	30.3	6.0	29.9	5.8	30.3	4.6	31.0	7.4
# Pupils in special education class	5.5	4.8	3.5	4.2	5.8	2.4	8.5	5.6

Table 2. Averages, standard deviations and differences in the measure of the feeling of teaching self-efficacy, the measure of empathy and their components according to educational framework

	Kindergartens (n=69)		Elementary Schools (n=37)		High Schools (n=43)		F _(2,148)	p
	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd		
Instructional strategies	4.36a	0.37	3.81b	0.32	3.75b	0.36	50.308	0.000
Classroom management	3.38b	0.31	3.24b	0.37	3.68a	0.55	12.295	0.000
Student engagement	3.66a	0.62	3.65a	0.43	3.09b	0.50	16.347	0.000
Measure of the feeling of teaching self-efficacy	3.90a	0.28	3.60b	0.29	3.54b	0.32	23.526	0.000
Empathetic concern	4.25a	0.60	3.98a	0.50	3.42b	0.55	28.266	0.000
Perspective taking	4.07a	0.48	3.86a	0.51	3.43b	0.50	22.539	0.000
Measure of empathy	4.16a	0.43	3.92b	0.41	3.40b	0.41	40.866	0.000

a-b: the different letters in each row represent the significant differences between averages according to the Tukey multiple regression test ($p < .001$).

Table 3. Averages, standard deviations and differences in the measure of the feeling of teaching self-efficacy, the measure of empathy and their components according to the teachers' academic degrees

	BEd(n=60)		BA(n=34)		MA(n=53)		F _(2,148)	p
	M	Sd	M	Sd	M	Sd		
Instructional strategies	4.26a	0.38	3.91b	0.47	3.88b	0.43	12.576	0.000
Classroom management	3.38	0.28	3.55	0.50	3.40	0.53	1.692	0.188
Student engagement	3.65a	0.64	3.39b	0.59	3.37b	0.53	3.724	0.027
Measure of the feeling of teaching self-efficacy	3.85a	0.27	3.66b	0.32	3.60b	0.36	9.021	0.000
Empathetic concern	4.16a	0.52	3.67b	0.79	3.88ab	0.63	6.872	0.001
Perspective taking	4.11a	0.50	3.73b	0.47	3.59b	0.57	15.200	0.000
Measure of empathy	4.14a	0.40	3.70b	0.54	3.74b	0.53	13.109	0.000

a-b: the different letters in each row represent the significant differences between averages according to the Tukey multiple regression test ($p < .001$).

Table 4. Pearson coefficients between the measure of the feeling of teaching self-efficacy, the measure of empathy and their components

	Instructional Strategies	Student Engagement	Classroom Management	Measure of Teaching Self-Efficacy
Empathetic concern	0.509***	-0.254**	0.312***	0.321***
Perspective taking	0.395***	0.165	0.315***	0.663***
Measure of empathy	0.474***	-0.251**	0.369***	0.386***
# Pupils with special needs	-0.193*	0.222**	-0.173*	-0.111

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

FINDINGS

The levels of teaching self-efficacy and empathy and their components were examined among teachers from three educational frameworks: kindergartens, elementary schools and high schools (see Table 2).

Higher averages of measures were found among the kindergarten teachers except for the student engagement component, which examined the relationship of the teacher with the children. The trend among the secondary school teachers was just the opposite, that is, the averages were lower for all of the measures, except for the component of student

engagement. For the measures of empathy and the feeling of teacher self-efficacy and for the instructional strategies component, the grades of the kindergarten teachers were significantly higher than those of the other teachers ($p < .001$). In the classroom management, empathic concern and perspective taking components, the grades of the secondary school teachers were significantly lower than those of the remaining teachers ($p < .001$). Only for the student engagement component were the grades of the secondary school teachers significantly higher than those of the other teachers ($p < .001$). The data analysis according to academic training division indicated that among the teachers holding a BEd degree, 72% of whom were kindergarten teachers, the measures of the feeling of teacher self-efficacy, empathy and their components were significantly higher than those of teachers holding BA and MA degrees.

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis of the components of the measure of teaching self-efficacy and educational frameworks in predicting the measure of empathy

Variable	B	SE B	β
Educational Framework	0.04	0.05	0.06
Instructional Strategies	0.48	0.10	0.42***
Student Engagement	-0.38	0.08	-0.32***
Classroom Management	0.17	0.06	0.20**
² R		0.37	
F		20.97***	

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

According to Table 5, the measure of empathy may be predicted according to the instructional strategies component (a teacher's ability in performing educational, learning and social tasks related to the kindergarten/school and the children), the student engagement component (the relationship of the teacher with the children) and the classroom management component (a teacher's organizational ability and his influence on decision-making in the kindergarten/school) ($R^2 = 0.37$, $p < .01$). The three educational frameworks were found to be unsuitable for predicting this measure ($p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

This research study examined the levels of teacher self-efficacy and empathy and the relationship between them. The study examined teachers from three school levels: kindergarten, elementary school and secondary school. Findings indicated in all of the emotional measures, except for one, the kindergarten teachers exhibited higher levels compared with the school teachers. This may suggest that teaching in early childhood classes requires from teachers to be more focused on emotional content, and expressions, and to be able to use them in order to meet young children's developmental needs (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011). Early childhood education is based primarily on developing and enhancing the social and emotional needs that are crucial for the development of the child's self, as well as the development of social, moral and interpersonal abilities (Kremenitzer & Miller, 2008; Howes, 2011). Teaching in early childhood classes requires teachers to feel confident about their creativity and emotional expressions in order to reach young children's inner worlds (LaParo, Siepak, & Scott-Little, C., 2009). An additional factor characterizing teaching in early childhood schools is the teacher's need to be flexible and put less

emphasis on teaching academic skills. The teacher must serve as a role model in providing focused emotional instruction, explanations and suitable demonstrations such as role-playing and arts & crafts activities (Van-oers, 2003). As in Roorda et al (2011) findings, in our research, the student engagement subscale (the measure of teacher self-efficacy), scored higher in secondary school teachers than in both early childhood and elementary school teachers. This finding may suggest that when teaching adolescents, teachers need to be more personally engaged with their students in order to support learning motivations (Wentzel, 2002) as well as encourage students' engagement and responsibility in their learning processes (Marks, 2000).

Finally, the research findings show that it is possible to predict the empathy of teachers from teacher self-efficacy components but not from the teaching degree. This finding is consistent with other findings showing that a high level of teacher self-efficacy contributes to the abilities of teachers to create an optimal study atmosphere, create a better relationship with weak pupils, refer fewer pupils suffering from learning difficulties to frameworks outside the classroom, and be more compassionate in their relationships with their pupils (Gibbs & Powell, 2011 Meijer & Foster, 1998; Tettegah & Anderson, 2007). Apparently in all school levels, teachers who possess a high level of teacher self-efficacy tend to be more empathic. These overall findings may have some interesting input into teacher education, as well as the importance of supporting and assisting teachers in achieving confidence in their teaching practices. It is suggested that confidence in teaching, for teachers in all school levels, is an important component that is associated with the teacher's ability to understand and meet their students inner needs (Cooper, 2004) as well as their emotional needs in teaching (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki & Schellinger, 2011). This seems to be especially true for early childhood teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Despite the reasonable research sample size, most of the research subjects were women. In addition, two measurement tools in this research were self-reporting tools.

Conclusion

The initial motivation for this research study stemmed from the belief in the strength of empathy in creating a change in the lives of individuals, whether it be the one who contains (the teacher) or the one who is contained (the pupil). Empathy is the main tool used in therapeutic theories, and in light of the educational-therapeutic approach that the education system in Israel and abroad employ, the need arose to promote empathy in the area of education. Empathy has many qualities, therefore, it is crucial to foster and empower it in the relationships that are created between the various figures taking part in the educational process – the pupils, the parents, the teachers, the school principals and other position-holders. In this research, a correlation was found between the feeling of teacher self-efficacy and the level of empathy that teacher demonstrates to pupils. From this we could conclude that in order to promote empathy in school, a teacher's feeling of self-efficacy should be fostered and cultivated. Fostering this feeling among kindergarten and school teachers is a complex task, especially since many teachers do not perceive the emotional and therapeutic side as being part of daily work. Therefore, one cannot expect pupils to see them as an address

for problems of this type. In order to bridge the gap between emotional and therapeutic expectations of the education system and what actually occurs in the classroom, Shakedy (1998) proposes creating a direct connection between education and psychology during the teacher-training stage and, of course, during teachers' professional development courses. Erhard (2008) mentions that empowering teachers is a way of creating an environment that enables optimal development and tapping the inherent potential of every pupil. With a high level of teachers' self-efficacy, the education system could provide an empathic response to the needs of the children educated in this system.

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