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Cultivating the emotional intelligence of instructional coaches

Instructional coaching is an increasingly common form of professional development that has the potential to enhance teaching practices through individualized instructional feedback and support (Collet, 2015; Cornett and Knight, 2008; Knight, 2007). To create the conditions for teachers to change their current practices, coaches must establish, foster, and maintain trusting relationships with teachers (Cornett and Knight, 2008; Netolicky, 2016; Patti *et al.*, 2015; Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran, 2010). The ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of another, referred to as emotional intelligence (EI), influences how individuals listen, communicate, and get along with others (Wats and Wats, 2009). In this study, we explored whether coaches improved their EI by participating in a coach training program designed, in part, to support the development of participants' empathy and listening skills. We also explored how participants perceived the relevance of EI to their success as instructional coaches. Previous studies that have investigated programs attempting to increase EI have been largely anecdotal (Groves *et al*., 2008; Long *et al*., 1999). This study contributes to the knowledge base by seeking to understand whether improved EI can enhance the effectiveness of instructional coaches at assisting teachers in improving instruction, and if so, how.

Instructional Coaches and Emotional Intelligence

Instructional coaching is a form of individualized, relationship-based professional development that is increasingly being used to improve the quality of instruction in elementary and secondary schools. Educators recognize that traditional models of professional development in large group settings are simply not effective at improving student achievement (Knight, 2007). To have an impact on student achievement, professional development must be research-based, ongoing, embedded, student-focused, and specific to grade levels or academic content (Learning Forward, 2011). Instructional coaching is a non-evaluative relationship between a teacher and coach who share the goal of learning together to improve instruction and student achievement (Knight, 2007). Teachers and coaches work collaboratively to plan, perform, and reflect on lessons taught. Coaches provide feedback from observations of coachee teaching, invite coachees' reflections on practice, and engage in discussion of alternative approaches to instruction (Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran, 2010). Coaching is "the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a

person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner" (Gallwey, 2000, p. 177). The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (ICF, 2009, p. 1). The International Association of Coaching (IAC) defines coaching as "a transformative process for personal and professional awareness, discovery and growth" (IAC, 2011, p. 1).

There is growing recognition of the importance for educators and leaders alike to be well armed with a variety of *hard skills* and *soft skills* (Mitchell *et al*., 2010). Hard skills are the technical requirements of a job, such as communication skills, specialized knowledge of policies and procedures, and management expertise. However, hard skills alone are not enough. To be successful, coaches must be tactful, compassionate, and sensitive to teachers' needs. Hence, educators need to develop EI as an essential skill for coaches as well as for the teachers they coach (Justice, 2010; Wats and Wats, 2009). Soft skills include both self-empathy, an awareness of one's own feelings and needs, as well as empathy toward others' feelings and needs (Nicolaides, 2002). These soft skills have been grouped together in the concept of EI (Goleman *et al*., 2002). A coach's ability to leverage EI in support of quality interactions between coach and coachee creates a work environment that is more satisfying and effective for all involved (Goyal and Akhilesh, 2007).

Emotional Intelligence

EI represents the ability to perceive emotions, to assess and understand emotions, to understand how feelings can facilitate cognitive activities and adaptive actions, and the ability to regulate emotions in one's self and in others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). An emotionally intelligent person is adept at understanding and responding in an appropriate way to the nuances of social situations, using his or her understanding of emotion in harmony with good reasoning skills to make reasonable decisions while maintaining good relationships (Drew, 2007; Mayer *et al*., 2004; Wats and Wats, 2009). Alternately, a person with low EI is likely to disregard or confuse the impact of human emotion in social settings. EI has been defined as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey and Mayer, 1990, p. 187). EI assists individuals in making good decisions and in

solving problems, and thereby contributes to career success (Bar-On, 2004; Caruso and Salovey, 2004; Goleman, 2000; Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

The need for both intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal communication skills is increasingly recognized. Employment shifts require employees to engage in more interpersonal interactions than ever before; thus, possessing only technical skills will not be adequate in the new global marketplace (Justice, 2010, Pink, 2006). Early models of EI were arranged on a two-by-two matrix, with self and others along one axis and awareness and management along the other (Goleman, 1995; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Later models grouped self-awareness and self-regulation of one's emotion into an intrapersonal dimension, and recognition of others' emotions and management of relationships into an interpersonal dimension (Bar-On, 2004; Justice, 2010). Each of these, in turn, consists of a variety of subskills.

Intrapersonal skills. Intrapersonal skills involve one's knowledge of and management of oneself. Self-empathy involves the respectful understanding and acceptance of one's emotions (Rosenberg, 2003). Self-awareness also entails having an accurate assessment of one's capabilities and characteristics (Bar-On, 1997). Self-regulation is evidenced by impulse control, conscientiousness, trustworthiness, and stress tolerance. A person's ability to cope with demands and pressure relies on the skills or aptitudes of adaptability, flexibility, and problem solving (Bar-On, 2004; Goleman, 1998). Another aspect of self-regulation is motivation, or the ability to get oneself engaged in a task. Motivation includes zeal, assertiveness, initiative, persistence, and a drive for achievement (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1998; 2000). Finally, a general mood of self-confidence, independence, and positive self-regard contributes to an orientation of optimism, resilience, and self-actualization (Bar-On, 1997; Justice, 2010).

Interpersonal skills. Interpersonal intelligence, as originally conceived, consists of social awareness, empathy, and relationship management (Bar-On, 1997; Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; 1998; Justice, 2010). Empathy has been described as a capacity to learn, analyze, and discriminate between subtle differences in one's own and others' emotions (Goleman, 1995) and as "the ability to accurately understand and constructively respond to the expressed feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and needs of others" (Nelson *et al*., 2011, p. 35). Empathy has been understood to have both cognitive and affective components. The cognitive component of empathy involves accurately perceiving and decoding the emotional state, thoughts, and feelings of another person, and working to understand that person's perspective

(Bohart *et al.*, 2002; Goleman, 1995). It includes recognition skills like reading nonverbal signals, body language, and facial expressions to determine the emotional state of another. The affective component is described as the emotional connection to another's emotional state (Davis, 1983; Thornton and Thornton, 1995; Thwaites and Bennett-Levy, 2007; Zaki *et al.*, 2008).

The interpersonal dimension of social skills or relationship management highlights the ability to get along well with others and to have a positive impact through one's relationships. Meaningful and productive relationships may be expressed through teamwork and collaboration in service of a collective goal (Salovey and Mayer, 1990), as well as through effective communication (Goleman, 1995). Positive relationship dimensions might also be expressed through behaviors often associated with leadership, such as inspiration, influence, developing others, and being a catalyst for change (Goleman, 1995; 1998), as well as a sense of social responsibility and service (Bar-On, 1997). Conflict management skills are an essential element of interpersonal EI as conflicts are an inevitable part of life (Justice, 2010).

Summary

It is apparent that EI is fundamental to an individual's ability to function at a high level. The ongoing debate centers on whether EI can be improved through training. Although some authors have made the claim that it can be improved with training, there is a gap in the literature about the nature of the training required (Boyatzis *et al.*, 2013; Grant, 2007; Sánchez-Núñez *et al.,* 2015; Stein and Book, 2000). There is a need for more research on the effectiveness of interventions designed to enhance the competencies involved in emotional intelligence. Thus, the focus of this research was to assess whether measureable improvement in EI could result from a training intervention with instructional coaches.

Methods

The focus of this research was to explore whether instructional coaches in elementary and secondary schools who completed a coach training program significantly improved their EI and to examine whether the EI training or subsequent improvements in EI improved their instructional coaching. This section describes the coach training intervention, as well as the participants, data sources, and methods of data analysis used for both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study.

The Intervention

The coach training program was designed to improve the coaching skills of educators who work as instructional coaches to improve the performance of teachers, in part by enhancing their EI. The training was delivered in a synchronous distance format in which the instructional coaches telephoned in to a virtual classroom that could be subdivided for dyad and triad practice sessions and discussions during class. The training consisted of 20 hours of classroom instruction delivered over 13 class meetings with up to 40 hours of documented practice outside of class. The training emphasized the in-depth practice of specific coaching skills. Participants watched coaching demonstrations, engaged in coaching practice, and received specific feedback on their coaching practice sessions.

The coaching model on which the training is based is organized in two "turns"—the no-fault turn that fosters a nonjudgmental understanding of how the other person is feeling and what they need in the present moment, and the strengths-based turn for discovering and building upon their capability and potential (Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran, 2010). The skills in the no-fault turn of the coaching model include listening to stories and expressing empathy (Rosenberg, 2003). The strengths-based turn draws on the philosophy and practice of appreciative inquiry and design thinking to equip coaches to foster improved practice among the teachers they coach. With these approaches to coaching conversations, instructional change is more likely because it reduces the defensiveness that can lead to resentment and resistance (Boyatzis *et al.,* 2013). The training participants were eligible to apply for certification in the coaching method by submitting a portfolio demonstrating their competence in the method; however, they were not required to do so.

Study Design

We chose a mixed-method design that included both a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase to provide a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between the training and the enhancement of EI and any consequent perceived improvements in instructional coaching. The quantitative phase sought to examine the extent to which EI increased, if at all, and what factors were associated with any increases. The qualitative phase of the study explored changes participants perceived in their level of EI as a result of the coach training program and their perception of how it affected their performance as instructional coaches. The participants in the qualitative phase of the study were selected based on their gain scores on the EI measure, with

about half drawn from those whose scores had increased and half from those whose scores declined.

Informed consent was obtained from participants in each phase of the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and that they could skip any items they felt uncomfortable answering or opt out of the study completely at any time without penalty. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the results.

Quantitative Phase

Survey participants. The participants were instructional coaches who enrolled in the coach training program during any of seven training cohorts over a period of 18 months. Of nearly 200 people in seven cohorts who completed the training and who were invited to participate in this study, 90 participants completed the pre and posttest EI assessment. This resulted in a response rate of 46%. Although they had a variety of job titles, all were charged with improving the instruction of the teachers they worked with. Among the 90 participants, 77 were female and 13 were male, which was similar to the gender distribution of the overall population of eligible participants. The participants were from eight states in various regions of the United States, as well as one each from India and Malaysia. Approximately half of the participants had elected to take the coach training on their own (n = 44, 49%), while the other half were directed to take the training as professional development required by their district (n = 46; 51%).

Quantitative data sources. For this phase of the study, EI was operationalized using the EQmentor (Justice, 2010), a commercially available measure of EI, marketed by Target Training International. It was used with permission in this study. The measure consisted of 57 questions, nine of which were reverse-scored. The participants rated each item using a five-point response scale: 5–Very Accurate, 4–Somewhat Accurate, 3–Neither Accurate nor Inaccurate, 2–Somewhat Inaccurate, or 1–Very Inaccurate. The total measure was divided into five subscales. The number of items, the internal consistency as calculated using Cronbach's alpha, and a sample question for each subscale are listed below.

- Self-awareness (10 items, $\alpha = .74$): "I am good at reading what other people are feeling."
- Self-regulation (12 items, $\alpha = .79$): "When a crisis arises, I know whom to turn to for help."

- Motivation (12 items, α = .77): "I do not let setbacks stand in the way of my dreams."
- Empathy (12 items, α = .76): "Nonverbal messages, such as tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions say a lot about how someone else is feeling."
- Social skills (11 items, α = .82): "When interacting with someone, I pause to think how he or she may be feeling."

In addition to the five subscales, there were two composite scales, an intrapersonal composite, and an interpersonal composite. The intrapersonal composite consisted of the sum of the self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation subscales (34 items, α = .89). The interpersonal composite consisted of the sum of the empathy and social skills subscales (23 items, α = .87). The total emotional quotient (EQ) score was calculated by adding the intrapersonal and interpersonal scores (57 items, α = 93).

Survey data collection. Identical pretest and posttest EI assessments were administered prior to and following the 20-hour training intervention. Participants were sent an invitation to participate in the study after enrolling in the coach training program and before the training began via electronic mail with a link to the survey. Participants were asked to complete the pretest prior to the first class, but did not receive the results of the pretest until they had completed the posttest at the conclusion of the training. Participants then received the results of both assessments.

Survey data analysis. Means and standard deviations were calculated for overall EI scores, the intrapersonal EI and interpersonal EI composite scores, and the five subscales of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills for both the pretest and the posttest. Comparisons between the pretest and the posttest results were analyzed using repeated measure *t*-tests to determine whether there were statistically significant changes in the EI of the participants. Data were also grouped for a comparison between volunteers and non-volunteers in the training.

Qualitative Phase

Interview participants. The participants in the qualitative phase of the study consisted of nine instructional coaches. The interview participants were selected through purposive sampling, with four who had increased their EQ score and five who had decreased their score from pretest to posttest. A rank order list of gain scores was compiled and participants were selected from the extremes of highest gain and highest declines. All of those interviewed were

female; one was African American and the rest were Caucasian. Participants were residents of four states representing the west, the south, and the mid-Atlantic of the United States.

Interview data. Participants' perceptions of their level of EI as a result of the training and their perception of the influence the training had on their practice as instructional coaches were obtained through interviews. The interviews took place following completion of the coach training intervention and the participants had received their EI scores. The nine interview questions were open-ended and designed to elicit participants' thoughts and perceptions relating to changes in their EI as a result of the training and the perceived impact of their level of EI on their performance as instructional coaches. Sample questions included: "What do you perceive to have been the impact of the training in the [coaching model] on your ability to recognize and relate to the emotions of others?" and "How do you perceive that your emotional intelligence affects your performance as an instructional coach?"

Interview data collection. All interviews took place by telephone. Participants were informed that the interview would be digitally recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy. They were also informed that pseudonyms would be used when reporting the data.

Qualitative data analysis. Interview data were interpreted by reviewing individual responses by question to determine themes, which were then categorized and coded in response to the research questions. Initial analysis of the interview data was conducted using open coding, in which unique patterns, themes, and categories were identified as they emerged from the responses. Coding categories were defined and refined in an evolving, reflective process of review (Patton, 2002).

Results

The purpose of this research study was to assess whether measureable improvement in EI would result from a coach training intervention in a PK-12 educational setting. The results are presented in two sections: first, the quantitative phase that examined gain scores on the EI survey, and second, the qualitative analysis of selected participants' perceptions of changes to their EI and the consequences of these changes for their practice as instructional coaches.

EI Assessment Results

Results of the quantitative phase of the study focused on whether significant differences existed in the total EQ scores for participants from pretest to posttest. Comparisons of the means for the total EQ and composite scores of intrapersonal EI and interpersonal EI, as well as

subscales of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills were made using repeated measures *t*-tests.

EI gain scores. Approximately two thirds of the participants saw their EQ scores increase (N = 53) or remain the same (n = 5), while about one third saw their scores decrease (n = 32). There was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest score for overall EI in the full sample (t = 2.52, p < .013). See Table 1. On the interpersonal composite score, participants demonstrated statistically significant improvements from the pretest and posttest (t = 3.10, p < .003). In addition, both the empathy (t = 2.12, p < .037), and social skills (t = 2.99, p < .004) subscales showed a statistically significant increase between the pretest and posttest scores. The intrapersonal composite did not differ between the pretest and posttest score; however, participants did demonstrate a significant increase in the motivation subscale (t = 2.50, p < .014).

Volunteers versus non-volunteers. It became apparent during the qualitative phase that some of the participants had sought out the training on their own while others were directed to participate in the training program as part of a district initiative. Further exploration of the results separating volunteers from non-volunteers revealed differences in the strengths of the gains made in EI. The results demonstrated that among volunteers there were statistically significant improvements in overall EQ in both the interpersonal and intrapersonal composite measures and in all five subscales. See Table 2. Participants who were required to take the training as a group as part of their job did not show significant improvement in their EI scores, although there were individuals in this group who did improve. Among non-volunteers, the only subscale to a show statistically significant difference was for self-regulation, and that was in a negative direction.

Qualitative Results

In the interview phase of this study, we were interested in what changes the participants perceived in their level of EI as a result of the training, and how they perceived that their EI affected their performance as an instructional coach. Five themes emerged from the interview data: (a) increased awareness, (b) improved listening, (c) enhanced empathy, (d) a focus on strengths, and (e) improved effectiveness in coaching. There were no substantial differences between the responses of the participants whose scores had improved on the EI assessment and those whose scores had declined. All expressed appreciation for the EI skills they had learned. Participants perceived that this coach training intervention had changed their approach, their

tone, their questioning techniques, and above all their listening techniques. In addition, the summary feedback from the EI assessment results revealed to the participants how important the basic skills of EI were in helping individuals learn how to work together more effectively. Several participants reported that reading the individualized feedback in the assessment report allowed them to see their own unique characteristics in a new light, creating a sometimes startling awareness of how they were perceived by others and pointing to possibilities for individual growth.

Increased Awareness

One of the most common statements regarding participants' EI was how they had increased awareness in their interactions with others. There is a strong emphasis in the coach training program on "coaching presence" and of being fully present to the person being coached. Participants described this as setting the stage for their coaching conversation. They recognized the importance of raising their conscious awareness of their coaching presence, describing this awareness as processing and understanding what is happening in the present moment. It was this awareness that created a new framework for expanding their ability to observe and focus on the current conversation. One participant described her growing awareness not as something to be arbitrarily turned on or off but as more of a gradual building up of her attentiveness to her surroundings and the people within those surroundings. This awareness is an essential starting point for EI.

An important part of assuming the proper coaching presence is the preparation immediately before a coaching session. Fostering this increased awareness allowed the coaches to take time before their coaching conversations to center themselves and ready themselves to be fully present to the person they were coaching. Both the International Coach Federation (2009) and the International Association of Coaching (2011) emphasize awareness as a core coaching competency. This awareness ultimately enabled them to provide more effective communication, better interpersonal relations, and deeper empathy. Jennifer, for example, mentioned that her increased EI provided her with the ability to be calm and understand how her own presence influenced the tone of the coaching conversation. Savannah shared that "this has been a very positive effect, because I am very aware of checking in with myself, clearing my own mind, setting aside what is going on for me, to really be present for the other person." Autumn spoke of

the relationship between awareness of her emotions and the management of those emotions. She reported:

> It brought, to a higher degree of awareness, of where my emotions were playing out. I was trying to drive the agenda as opposed to being concerned, doing the listening that is so critical. … It raised the awareness for me and allows that awareness of the other person, which results in more self-control.

Likewise, Shannon described self-management of her emotions, of learning to control her verbal and facial expressions during the conversation, as well to be aware of how often she spoke, how she spoke, and what she said. The increased awareness of their own emotions, a key component of EI, was essential for helping the participants discover new coaching techniques and, with these new skills, see powerful shifts in the teachers they were coaching.

Improved Listening

There is a strong emphasis in the coach training program on learning to listen well, and the participants shared that improving listening skills was one of the most potent facets of the training. All nine participants saw improvements in themselves in the art and skill of listening well. Most referred to giving themselves permission to just listen—to pause, to reflect, and to take the time to slow down the conversation. They found this skill to be both very powerful and effective at enabling the person being coached to engage more deeply in the coaching process. Learning to listen more effectively allowed the participants to put aside their own agenda and focus on the other person. This contributed to the coaching goals of raising awareness and generating responsibility on the part of the coachee. Jennifer shared:

> I learned a lot about listening. I would say that that was one of the highlights—that I could be able to allow myself to commit 100% to what the other person really needed support in, to put my agenda aside, and be able to really listen fully to what they had to say, so that I was more of a partner than an expert when I was working with them. So, listening without talking was huge.

Eleanor echoed Jennifer's remarks about focusing on the needs of the other person. She felt that attentive, quiet, and mindful listening helped her coaching:

> I feel the training helped me to listen—listen for feelings, listen for emotions—also to be aware of the different cues for body language, and that type of thing. Before, I really

didn't know how to be observant in that way. [Not] thinking of my next question, [not] thinking of my next statement—really being in the moment and listening to the teacher. Holly shared that reflective listening helped her to be purposeful in listening for where people are and what support they need. With their needs in mind, she used her listening skills to help them to grow individually and to discover the answer they were seeking.

Enhanced Empathy

Empathy was a theme mentioned by all nine participants, and participants spoke more about this topic than any other theme. The salience of this theme reflected the coach training program's heavy focus on the importance of empathy in a successful coaching relationship. Through expressing empathy, participants increased their awareness and understanding of the feelings and needs of the teachers they were coaching. Participants were able to appreciate the experience of the other person and foster new possibilities for change. Through opening up to the feelings and needs of the other person, the coaches reported that they could visually observe the other person relaxing, trusting, growing, and changing. By demonstrating empathy, they made a connection that empowered both coach and teacher, although they also shared that it was a challenge to avoid falling back into the trap of being judgmental and wanting to evaluate instead of strictly make observations.

Zhanna shared a story of a second grade teacher (seven-year-olds) who was frustrated by how her students were performing in math. Zhanna said she wanted to tell the teacher exactly what to do—to say, "You do x, y, and z." Instead, she paused, waited, and then offered a reflection acknowledging the frustration the teacher had been feeling and the teacher's need for competence and contribution. Zhanna conveyed acceptance of the teacher right where she was at that particular moment. She then invited the teacher to brainstorm solutions, and the teacher was able to come up with her own strategies for future math lessons. Through respect, appreciation, and understanding, Zhanna used empathy to bolster the teacher's sense of competence, or self-efficacy, in planning for future lessons. Another example from Shannon concerned a teacher's frustrations about two students who were not getting their work done during regular school hours. The teacher was becoming resentful of giving up her lunchtime to help these students with unfinished work during their recess time. By expressing empathy, Shannon was able to assist the teacher with working through some of her frustration. With Shannon's encouragement, the

teacher was able to find other ways to assist the students and to give herself permission to take her lunch and attend to her own needs.

A Focus on Strengths

Another aspect of the training program mentioned by participants was the focus on strengths. This was related to EI in that it brought into focus the need to bolster the self-efficacy of the person being coached in order to boost their motivation and persistence in a change process. It was also a means of reducing defensiveness and fear on the part of the coachee and providing the coach with a means of "rolling with resistance." Holly shared that "what I have learned is that strategy and technique are not at the heart of what moves a person or a team or an organization; it is letting people know that you value and respect their part to play." Jennifer noted that one of the biggest impacts from the training was the fact that she now looks for strengths in people, starting with what is going well and building from that point. Jennifer thought that due to this change in her practice, the people she works with are more positive, get more excited about what they really want to happen, and reconnect with their own good intentions for doing what they are doing. Jennifer stated, "It seems to me that it inspires change instead of requiring change." She elaborated:

> I led my organization in an appreciative inquiry summit, and it changed our entire organizational structure and how we evaluate people. Not evaluation, but really valuation. We are talking about how we valuate people. We added celebration and appreciative inquiry stories to every agenda … We are constantly talking to each other about what went well.

Improved Effectiveness of Coaching

When participants were asked to share how their perceived EI affected their performance as a coach, all of the participants confirmed that improved EI had a positive impact on their performance, regardless of whether their EI scores had increased or declined. They expressed the belief that becoming more attuned to EI had emerged primarily in their interpersonal strategies for creating rapport with their colleagues. For example, Holly shared how she had changed her approach as a coach:

> Wow, I think that it has helped me deepen relationships with my colleagues. It has helped me move into new relationships with new teachers to the district or younger teachers to

the profession that I don't already have relationships with. I have become fearless about being open and present—that is very strong in me since this course.

Each of the participants shared examples of how their coaching of teachers had changed in positive ways as a result of the training. Frances described how the coach training had changed the whole coaching process for her. She saw herself falling into some of the "traps" described in the training program:

> I think it changed, completely changed, the way that I did coaching. In understanding coaching prior to this, I was falling into [telling] teachers just what to do, not helping them figure out what they needed to do. I was doing the majority of the talking. I was giving a lot of examples. I was being more, I think, a supervising kind of role, or a master teacher kind of role, instead of a coach role … I wanted to fix things. We want to get in and make it happen. And [to] realize that is not my responsibility—my responsibility is to help the teacher get there. It really gave me a different perspective.

Frances indicated the coach training program enabled her to become more aware of the impact of her coaching behaviors and how her behavior impacted the person she was coaching.

Holly commented that coaching in this way was a satisfying way to engage with adults in their learning journey, to move into a space where you have provided them with a safe and secure environment and, from there, to chart a course by which they accomplish something important to them. She noted:

> It has really helped me to step back. The questioning techniques that are taught through the [coach training program] are very powerful, and what I have come to see is that if I can listen in this manner, and I can ask the questions to lead people in their own truths and their own "ah-ha's," so to speak, that is what is really fulfilling to me.

She described how working with adults to foster their learning resulted in the same kind of excitement teachers found so rewarding in working with the students in their classrooms.

Summary

The findings of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study provide evidence that EI can be developed through training. Among the participants who took the training voluntarily, there were statistically significant improvements in their EI scores. Among the coaches interviewed, all felt that their performance was improved through greater EI,

whether their scores on the EI assessment had increased or not. This may raise questions about the validity of the EI measure, which we discuss below.

Discussion

Employers have described soft skills as being hard to teach; however, the results of this study provide limited empirical support that EI can be developed through training. In schools, the growing use of teams requires greater EI on the part of instructional coaches and teachers alike to manage the inevitable conflicts that arise in these complex work environments. Both self-empathy and empathy directed toward others are grounded in an understanding of the feelings and underlying universal needs that drive behavior. Instructional coaches with empathy are attuned to a wide range of emotional signals, allowing them to be responsive to the emotions of others. EI depends upon responsiveness to the emotions of another in the context of a relationship, and this was improved by the coach training program. The participants in this study noted that their increased empathy was having a positive impact on their coaching relationships. Empathy is also a potent asset in increasingly diverse school settings, as cross-cultural dialogs can easily lead to misunderstandings. Empathy helps people get along with others from different backgrounds and cultures (Goleman, 2011). EI also includes being a good listener and the art of asking good questions. Participants perceived that these were skills they had gained as part of the training program, as well as learning to adopt a strengths-based orientation.

It is noteworthy that nearly a third of participants decreased in their scores on the EI assessment between the pretest and the posttest. This raises questions about the validity of a measure that is based on self-perceptions, as it seems unlikely that the participants actually declined in their EI skills as a result of the training. What seems more likely is that participants were sensitized to issues of EI they had previously ignored, and thus responded to the questions on the assessment differently on the posttest as a result of a deeper understanding of those survey items.

It is interesting that scores on the motivation subscale of the EQmentor improved for those who volunteered for the training. Motivation is a critical element of both adult and childhood learning, so an intervention that increases motivation is of interest. One of the most powerful theories of motivation suggests that increasing a sense of self-efficacy is important to increasing the effort, persistence, and resilience brought to a task (Bandura, 1997). With the attention to specific skills development in the training program, it is likely that participants came

away with greater confidence in their coaching skills. Because they watched coaching demonstrations and received specific feedback on their coaching practice sessions, they drew from two sources of self-efficacy: vicarious experiences (i.e., watching someone else model the target skill) and verbal persuasion (i.e., comments from others about one's performance). In addition, to the extent that they experienced greater success in their coaching relationships as a result of the skills that they learned in the program, as the participants interviewed perceived that they had, these successes would constitute mastery experiences, the most potent source of self-efficacy. Bandura contended that emotional and physiological arousal, the final source of self-efficacy, was only relevant to the extent that the person was cognizant of their feelings. This means that the greater self-empathy generated by what was learned in the training may have made this emotional content a larger contributor to increased motivation as well.

Those who elected to participate in the training saw additional gains in the intrapersonal EI subscales of self-awareness and self-regulation. Although self-empathy was not emphasized during the program itself, those who took the initiative on their own to learn this coaching method may have come away with a greater awareness and appreciation for their own feelings and needs in addition to those of the people they were coaching. Many of the interview participants noted that greater self-regulation had resulted from this heightened self-empathy. That the scores of the non-volunteers decreased in the area of self-regulation may have been because the greater sensitivity to their own needs made them more aware that their needs for autonomy were not met when they were required to make such a significant commitment of time and effort as was required by this training. A fundamental principle of coaching is coachee responsibility for and choice in their own professional learning, but these coaches were not offered that choice (Knight, 2007; Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran, 2010). Attending to the need for choice in professional development offerings as an aspect of adult learning is an important consideration for the field.

Furthermore, Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis *et al.,* 2013) suggests that those who pursued this training on their own may have been motivated by a desire to improve their skills to more closely approximate their ideal self and thus, may have adopted a learning orientation to the training, resulting in an increased openness to honing new skills. Meanwhile, those who participated as part of a cohort of colleagues they worked with, including in some cases those

who supervised them, may have been motivated by a performance orientation and thus, lacked sufficient safety for the risk-taking new learning in the realm of EI entails.

Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations that readers should keep in mind when interpreting the results of this study. The participants of this study were a sample of those who had participated in a particular training program. The responses from the participants are limited to those participants who responded and may or may not be similar to those participants who did not respond. This study would have been strengthened by the inclusion of a control group that received no training. In addition, the improvements in specific skills that the coaches perceived might have been triangulated with coachee accounts or independent observations. Furthermore, the effects of the intervention were determined by comparing the pretest and posttest scores using the same assessment, so participants had prior knowledge of the assessment on the posttest. They may also have interpreted the question items differently with greater knowledge and awareness of EI when taking the posttest, which led them to judge themselves differently from when they took the pretest. Finally, the interviewees had received their EQmentor scores prior to their interview, and these scores may have influenced their answers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study offer intriguing evidence of the importance of EI to the work of instructional coaches as they support teachers to improve instruction. These findings further strengthen the sense of urgency for more research in this area. The following recommendations for future research are offered as some possible places to begin. The coach training program in this study entailed 20 hours of instruction and up to 40 hours of practice outside of class. It would be useful to explore whether similar results could be achieved in a less intensive training program. Grant (2007) found that a training program spaced over 13 weeks was more effective at enhancing the emotional intelligence of coaches than a training program that was based on the same coaching model but that was conducted over two daylong intensives spaced several weeks apart. Thus, the issue of the needed intensity of training to improve EI needs more study. Further, Sánchez-Núñez *et al.*, (2015), asserted that it was important to incorporate explicit training in the target EI skills that are desired.

Moreover, the intervention examined was offered in a distance format. It would be interesting to explore whether the results would differ with a face-to-face delivery model. The

divergence in outcomes between the volunteer and non-volunteer participants suggests that further research into the role of choice in professional learning would contribute important new insights. Future studies might also explore whether the declines in EI scores among some participants were the result of an actual decay of skills or due to heightened awareness of issues of self-regulation and perhaps other subscales as well. In addition, longitudinal research exploring the development of self-efficacy beliefs and fluctuations in those beliefs during the course of training would be useful to the field. Future research might also find ways to triangulate coaches' perceived improvement in practice with coachee accounts or independent observations. Finally, it would be useful to explore the degree to which improved instruction as a result of coaching impacts the coachee's performance and student learning.

Conclusion

This study explored the extent to which the emotional intelligence of instructional coaches increased as a result of participation in a coach training program. The results provided evidence that EI can be developed in measurable and statistically significant ways. In addition, the coaches interviewed reported that their improved EI had improved their effectiveness in assisting teachers to improve instruction. Our hope is that these findings will be helpful to future instructional coaches who are dedicated to improving instruction in their schools.

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Table 1

Pre and Post-Test Comparisons of Emotional Intelligence Subscales

EQ	N	Pretest Mean	*SD*	Posttest Mean	*SD*	*T*	Sig.
Self-Awareness	90	7.03	.82	7.18	1.00	1.92	.059
Self-Regulation	90	6.70	1.09	6.68	1.11	-.203	.840
Motivation	90	7.44	1.31	7.63	1.11	**2.50**	**.014***
Intrapersonal Composite	90	7.06	.83	7.16	.89	1.70	.092
Empathy	90	7.64	1.05	7.79	.97	**2.12**	**.037***
Social Skills	90	7.01	1.19	7.22	.92	**2.99**	**.004***
Interpersonal Composite	90	7.34	1.00	7.52	.92	**3.10**	**.003***
Total EQ Score	90	7.17	.80	7.30	.81	**2.52**	**.013***

Statistically significant changes are indicated in bold. * p < .05.

Table 2

Pre and Posttest Comparisons of Emotional Intelligence Subscales for Non-Volunteers and Volunteers

EQ	N	Pretest Mean	*SD*	Posttest Mean	*SD*	*T*	Sig.
Non-Volunteers							
Self-Awareness	46	7.06	.72	7.10	.92	.36	.717
Self-Regulation	46	6.83	1.14	6.55	1.17	**-2.82**	**.007***
Motivation	46	7.38	1.05	7.48	1.17	.99	.329
Intrapersonal Composite	46	7.10	.82	7.03	.92	-.892	.377
Empathy	46	7.56	1.16	7.66	1.04	.973	.336
Social Skills	46	7.00	1.28	7.19	1.00	1.94	.058
Interpersonal Composite	46	7.29	1.12	7.43	.93	1.63	.110
Total EQ Score	46	7.17	.83	7.19	.81	.272	.786
Volunteers							
Self-Awareness	44	7.00	.93	7.26	1.07	**2.41**	**.021***
Self-Regulation	44	6.55	1.03	6.81	1.03	**2.28**	**.028***
Motivation	44	7.50	1.32	7.79	1.04	**2.48**	**.017***
Intrapersonal Composite	44	7.01	.85	7.30	.85	**3.25**	**.002***
Empathy	44	7.73	.92	7.92	.88	**2.11**	**.041***
Social Skills	44	7.03	1.12	7.26	1.13	**2.26**	**.029***
Interpersonal Composite	44	7.38	.87	7.61	.91	**2.78**	**.008***
Total EQ Score	44	7.16	.78	7.42	.81	**3.39**	**.002***

*$p < .05$