The Interwoven Characteristics of Emotional intelligence and Sanford Meisner Actor Training

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The International Journal of Transformative Emotional Intelligence: Research, Theory, and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The development of emotional intelligence (EI) is important for life success and happiness. This article defines and demonstrates links between emotional intelligence (EI) and actor training. Until now, only general associations have been made linking actor training and social abilities. In this quantitative design, pretest and posttest scores on the dependent variable, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), were compared after one semester to see if actor training had any impact on EI ability. The three levels of the independent variable included a Sanford Meisner actor training group, a non-embossed actor training group, and a special interest actor training group. No significant difference in MSCEIT scores were found in this pilot study based on the training approaches. Reasons for the findings may be that significant EI development may take more than one semester and/or a different, mixed-methods model is needed to conceptualize EI. Through this article I explore the notion that EI skills are very similar to those taught in the arts and provide suggestions for further research to investigate this powerful relationship. The human condition is elevated when individuals engage in processes that develop themselves in personally meaningful, positive ways.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence has been linked in the development of social skills, both inside and outside the realm of psychology. Predominant skills in actor training, specifically those demonstrated in Sanford Meisner actor training, parallel those of emotional intelligence including empathy, theory of mind, individual affect regulation, and mutual affect regulation. The benefits of having a high EI have been well documented. These include obtaining and appreciating employment (Khalili, 2012) which can lead to a happier and more fulfilled life, sustained interpersonal relationships, (Schröder-Abé & Schütz, 2011), and attainment of psychological well-being (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). The purpose of this article is to summarize and highlight areas where actor training and the development of EI are complimentary, and by offering additional depth about the connections, establish a rationale and specific suggestions for future research in this area.

DEFINITIONS OF EI AND ACTING

To insure we are working with the same notions, let us name the definitions of EI and the areas of EI skills and then explore acting. For the purposes of this article, definitions of EI, EI skills and acting will be provided. Emotional intelligence is defined as “the subset of social intelligences that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 187). This article will expand on this definition (to include skills of EI) as recognizing and naming emotions, how emotions develop, and successfully employing these skills (Rahgozar et al., 2011). The areas of EI include empathy, Theory of Mind (ToM), affect regulation, and the ability to regulate emotions with others. Empathy is defined as the ability to feel another person’s feelings (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006). ToM is the skill of inferring mental states in others (Carlson & Moses, 2001). ToM is separate from empathy due to empathy requiring a person to feel another person’s emotion; ToM is solely a function of cognition (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). Markedly, ToM and empathy have been defined employing the same criteria (Brabec, Gfeller, & Ross, 2012; Goldstein, 2010), in addition to being identified as folk psychology (Gopnik & Wellman, 1994). “Emotion [or affect] regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence what
individual and mutually. Being in relationship with another person consciously opens the possibility for ways we relate to each other to grow, specifically through expanding relational understanding (Tronick, 2007).

**Conclusion: A Call for Research**

Though we no longer believe we are wired to value emotions over cognition (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009), discovering how to evolve and increase EI can substantially impact the quality of a person’s life as well as the quality of lives connected to this person. When engaged in actor training, an actor is required to examine how he or she operates in the world. Biases, interests, passions, disgust, and any other myriad of points of view on experiences inform this world view through investigation of character as well as Meisner acting exercises (i.e. Repetition). This awareness of self allows a person to make choices around his or her life that best align with this world view. As a result, this person will be happier because he is operating from an aware and active personal manner inspired by actor training. Adding Nelson and Low’s transformative conceptualization of emotional intelligence with the ability model used in this study, may prove helpful to understand how EI can be developed. In addition, combining the ELS (Nelson et al., 2015) with Meisner acting exercises may further leverage repetition for deeper and more personally meaningful development. Hence, we can further investigate benefits of actor training on EI.

Research is required to offer a more thorough understanding of the skills involved in EI and actor training. Many studies have investigated relationships in children and adolescent and skills of EI (Goldstein & Winner, 2009; Goldstein, Wu & Winner, 2009-2010; Goldstein, 2010; Goldstein, 2011; Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Goldstein & Bloom, 2011) but these same skills have yet to be explored in adults thoroughly. Other than Corwin’s (2014) study looking and how Meisner training impacts EI and gender in under a sixteen week span, studies with adult participants have yet to look at long term impacts over time. Furthermore, Ghorbaniroodi et al. (2001) found additional research looking at how psychological health and EI are impacted by communication. The very foundation of actor training requires participants examine how and why people communicate. As a result, ownership of emotions through articulation and understanding allows a person the opportunity to enjoy life more and own his or her experience (Pascual-Leone, Paivio, & Harrington, in press). Since investigating innovative techniques to increase EI skills is needed (Cherniss and Goleman, 2001), longitudinal research examining actor training and its impacts on EI is a gap in the literature. In summation, more research is necessary to identify if adults who participate in Meisner actor training impact skills of EI.

**Author Note**

Heather L. Corwin holds a PhD in clinical psychology with a somatic concentration from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology and an MFA in Acting from Florida State University/Asolo Conservatory. Currently, she is the Head of Movement for actor training at Northern Illinois University working with graduates and undergraduates. As an actor for over 20 years and theatre arts professor, she examines behavior through the lens of psychology, allowing the flaws of being human to unite us through creative expression. Corwin is a Rolf®er, a belly laugher, married to the love of her life, a mother to an energetic five-year-old, and a fan of historical romance. To read more publications and learn more about Corwin, please visit BodybyHeather.com or HeatherC.com.
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The development of emotional intelligence (EI) is important for life success and happiness. This article defines and demonstrates links between emotional intelligence (EI) and actor training. Actor training is suggested as one way to develop EI skills in individuals, and future research directions are offered to further investigate this theme.

