

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

AN EXPLORATION OF HOW OUTSTANDING TEACHERS USE EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE TO CREATE POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATES

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF APPLIED AND PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY  
OF  
RUTGERS,  
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY  
BY  
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF  
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

OCTOBER, 2015

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# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

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# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

## Abstract

The objectives of this qualitative study were to (a) explore *how* outstanding teachers use their emotional intelligence to create positive classroom climates and to understand the mechanism by which a teacher's emotional intelligence can influence his/her ability to create and maintain these climates; and (b) explore *whether* outstanding teachers use and manage emotions differently than typical teachers. Eight teachers, including four administrator-nominated typical teachers and four administrator-nominated outstanding teachers, from one single-sex religious high school were closely studied via semi-structured interviews and behavioral classroom observations. A systematic and intensely disciplined qualitative analysis of the data using both intra-case and cross-case analysis yielded six primary themes which differentiated typical teachers from outstanding teachers: (a) outstanding teachers constantly monitored emotions in the classroom, (b) outstanding teachers expressed greater empathy in response to student complaints, (c) outstanding teachers experienced and modeled more passion about their subject areas, (d) outstanding teachers engaged in more emotional self-regulation techniques in response to frustrating classroom behaviors, (e) outstanding teachers engaged in fewer negative classroom management strategies, and (f) outstanding teachers used student-focused techniques rather than self-revelation to forge relationships with students. Each theme is then explored in relation to the construct of emotional intelligence and in relation to current research on effective teaching. Implications for teacher training, evaluation, consultation and recruitment are discussed.

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my incredible parents, to whom I owe absolutely everything. Words can never thank you enough, Mom and Dad, for everything you have done for me to get me to this point in life. For giving me an incredible education, for your constant love, support and help, and most importantly, for giving me the inspiration and tools I needed to always “fly as high and far as I can.” I hope that one day I can become just a tiny speck of the amazing role models that you are for me. If I have accomplished anything so far in life, it is only because of you.

I would like to thank Bubby Addy, whose constant vivaciousness, enthusiasm, affection and encouragement have shaped me into the person I am today. You have been my inspiration to become a psychologist since I was very young, and I am so excited to reach this milestone with you. I am so fortunate to have you in my life, and I could never, ever, have gotten here without you.

To my Bubby Rosie, A”H, I so wish you were here to see this day. Your heroism and bravery, surviving the Nazi concentration camps and coming to the United States to raise a beautiful large family, have inspired me tremendously throughout my life, imbuing me with the determination I needed to devote my life to dreams and goals worth fighting for. I only hope that I, along with my daughter, Michal Rosa, will bring you tremendous nachas, always.

To Susie and Avi: my whole life I could always count on you. For Sundays growing up. For pizza. For Costco. For everything. There are no words. Thank you for Eliana, who is my not-so-little sister, for Effie, who inspires me always, for Marky, who is so bright, and for Rosie who makes the world so bright.

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To David and Malky: thank you for always being there for us; for always being so much fun, even when it's not Purim; for always showing me what it means to be a great parent. Thank you for Shira, who is such a princess, for Moshe who is such a prince, and for Yitzchok who is such a little prince.

To Jody and Amichai: thank you for being our anchors. For taking care of me always. For being the first and last call. For Dina, who is beyond talented; for Yaakov, who is beyond amazing; for Rosa, who is beyond special, and Yehuda, who is beyond cute.

To Mom and Dad Koppel: thank you for loving me like a daughter and treating me like a princess.

To Janie and Grandpa Bob: thank you both for being the bedrock and the polestar of the Kramer-Hodkin-Koppel-Gassner extended family. We love you so much and wish you nachas from your children-grandchildren-and great-grandchildren.

To Michie, for making Mordechai laugh; to Jeremy, for making me laugh; and to Bret, for just laughing—we couldn't do what we're doing without your love, support and kindness. I am so grateful.

To Cary, for being a constant mentor and inspiration throughout my GSAPP experience, and for teaching me, supporting me, and encouraging me during each step throughout this process. You epitomize what it means to be a “transformational leader,” and I have gained immeasurably from your knowledge, wit, and empowerment. Words cannot thank you enough for the impact you have made on my GSAPP experience.

To Anne, for being a true “outstanding teacher.” You have engaged, empowered, and motivated each of us to operate to our fullest, and accomplish things we never even dreamed of being able to accomplish. Thank you so much for being a mentor, role-model, and fantastic

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instructor throughout my time here. You have made a major impact on my development as a professional.

To Dean Messer, for your constant support and encouragement throughout GSAPP. I so appreciated all of your thoughtful advice and support throughout my journey. You became a role model very early on during my time at GSAPP, and remained a role model. Thank you.

To Alexi, Danielle and Rachel: thank you for all of your hard work as RAs- you will make fantastic researchers and clinicians.

Thank you to Mrs. Shoshana Greenbaum, A”H, my incredible sixth-grade teacher, for inspiring me to study outstanding teachers and how their work can impact students’ lives. You were a shining role model to everyone you taught, and you touched so many of our lives. Words can never thank you enough for who you were for me. I can only hope that you would be proud to see the lives we are living today.

To Michal Rosa Hodkin, for making every single day of life so incredibly sweet.

To Mordechai, for being my life’s partner. For teaching me what it means to spend every second of life working towards our dreams and goals. For making every day so happy and fulfilling. Thank you so much for all that you have put in to get us here.

To Hashem, for bringing us to this point. May there be many opportunities to express gratitude and happiness on future journeys and adventures!

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# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

## **Introduction**

Research on emotional intelligence and effective leadership has established a strong link between emotional intelligence, or the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others (Cherniss, 2010) and the ability to foster effective leadership and create positive working environments across businesses and organizations. Studies have demonstrated that leaders who are emotionally intelligent tend to possess qualities such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002) that may enable or even constitute their efficacy as leaders and may help them create the effective work environments that are conducive to employee success. Research has indicated that emotionally intelligent leaders are better able to influence others (Murphy, 2002), articulate clear and compelling visions (Bass, 2002), display sensitivity to their followers' needs (Cherniss, 2010), mediate between conflicting individual and group demands (Zaccaro, 2002), and embrace cultural diversity to increase cohesiveness in their organizations (Offerman & Phan, 2002).

## **Emotional Intelligence and Outstanding Teaching**

Given the importance of emotional intelligence in effective organizational and school leadership, outstanding teachers (who are the "leaders of the classroom") might very well be those teachers who are better able to not only regulate their own emotions but also understand when and how to express these emotions, influence the climate of their classrooms, and create environments that are conducive to student learning and growth.

Indeed, researchers have indicated that emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses the underlying, foundational characteristics and abilities that support positive teacher efficacy, and that teachers with better coping skills are more effective at relating to students and have more adaptive classroom management skills (e.g., Austin, Shah, et al., 2005; Emmer & Stough, 2001;

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Libbey, 2004). Research tracking students' and professionals' descriptions of effective teachers have included characteristics such as being "caring, understanding, warm, friendly, and patient," and abilities such as the ability to relate to children, to motivate students, and to maintain discipline (Weinstein, 1989)—all skills that seem to suggest the necessity for outstanding emotional intelligence.

Additionally, the link between emotional intelligence and successful job performance is especially salient in jobs requiring "emotional labor" (Joseph & Newman, 2010), as research seems to indicate that stronger relationships between an individual's emotional regulation and job performance are found in high emotional labor jobs than low emotional labor jobs. Teaching is often conceptualized as a high emotional labor job as it involves constant interactions with an assortment of different students (Gregoriadis & Tsigilis, 2008), challenges such as poor student motivation and misconduct, and a host of systems and classroom-level difficulties that may trigger feelings of stress and anger on the part of the teacher (Abel & Sewell, 2001; Jacobsson, Pousette, & Thylefors, 2001). As a result, emotional intelligence may be even more closely linked to job performance in teaching than in other less-emotionally laborious jobs.

Illustratively, recent research indicates that effective teachers are those who are better able to regulate their own emotions and those of students (Sutton, 2004) and who score higher on EI tests, tend to deal more constructively with negative situations, and are more likely to look for positive solutions within their classrooms (Perry & Ball, 2007). Additionally, a teacher's EI appears to be closely linked to his or her ability to cope adaptively in classroom teaching (e.g., Brackett & Katulak, 2007; Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, & Woods, 2007; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009).

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Indeed, the most effective teachers create a “safe” and positive learning environment within their classrooms (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hughes, 2002; Roland & Galloway, 2002). To do this, they often convey passion and enthusiasm for the subject matter (Littky et al., 2004), convey feelings of care and set high expectations for at-risk students (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), foster close relationships with students (Ertesvag, 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Gregory & Weinstein, 2004), provide positive reinforcement when necessary (Martin & Pear, 1996), manage classrooms efficiently and effectively (Good & Brophy, 2007), generate “transformative” learning environments for their students (Low & Nelson, 2005), and engender authoritative classroom settings by creating an environment that is high in teacher expectations and warmth (Walker, 2009; Baker et al., 2009). All of these activities require emotional intelligence on the part of the teacher.

### **The Construct of Emotional Intelligence**

While there has recently been a surge in research and popular interest on emotional intelligence (Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2002), there is still a lack of agreement within the literature about what comprises EI and how it should be measured (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2007). Disputes about the terminology and operationalization of emotional intelligence have contributed to the clustering of EI constructs into two basic theoretical models: the trait-based model and the ability-based model (Matthews et al., 2007; Perez, Petrides, & Furnham, 2005; Schulze, Wilhelm, & Kyllonen, 2007). Whereas the ability model conceptualizes EI as a type of intelligence or aptitude such as the ability to “perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions in self and others” (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso 1997), the trait model conceptualizes EI as a collection of “behavioral dispositions and noncognitive self-perceived capabilities” (Furnham & Petrides, 2003).

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According to Mayer and Salovey's ability-based model (1997), emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive and express emotions, to understand and use them, and to manage them to foster personal growth. In revised iterations of this model, emotional intelligence is conceived as four dimensions or "branches": (a) Perceiving and Identifying Emotions—the ability to recognize how the individual himself and those around the individual are feeling, (b) Using Emotions to Facilitate Thought—the ability to generate emotion, and then reason with this emotion, (c) Understanding Emotions—the ability to understand complex emotions and emotional "chains," and how emotions transition from one stage to another, and (d) Managing Emotions—the ability to manage emotions in oneself and in others. These four related areas of emotional intelligence are conceptualized as "branches" arranged in a hierarchical order, from least to most psychologically complex.

The authors propose that the lowest level of each branch concerns the relatively simple abilities of perceiving and expressing emotion, whereas the highest levels of each branch concern the conscious, reflective regulation of emotion. As a result, based on this model, individuals with stronger emotional intelligence will be able to engage in higher-level abilities within each branch than individuals with lower levels of emotional intelligence. This model was used to develop two batteries designed to assess emotional intelligence, both organized in accord with the four-branch model: the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence scale and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso & Lopez, 2003).

Salovey et al. (2003) describes the first branch, "Perceiving Emotion," as the ability of individuals to recognize how they, themselves, as well as others around them, are feeling. Perceiving Emotion involves an individual's capacity to perceive feelings accurately by attending to and accurately decoding emotional signals in facial expressions, tone of voice, and

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artistic expressions. Attending to emotional expressions is critical to accurate appraisal of emotions (Salovey et al., 2003). For example, if teachers are not constantly monitoring their classroom for emotions, they may miss critical cues that could indicate a student's emotional state. The authors describe abilities such as: identifying emotions in one's physical states, feelings, and thoughts; identifying emotions in other people, designs, artwork, language, sound, appearance, and behavior; expressing emotions accurately, and expressing needs related to those feelings; and discriminating between accurate and inaccurate, or honest vs. dishonest, expressions of feeling as falling within this domain of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 2007).

Further, the authors describe the second branch, "Facilitating Thought," as the ability to employ feelings to enhance the cognitive system, and engage in more effective problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making, and creative endeavors (Salovey et al., 2003). Abilities within this domain include utilizing emotions to help prioritize thinking by directing attention to important information; experiencing emotions that are "sufficiently vivid and available" in order to use them as aids to judgment and memories concerning feelings; experiencing changes in emotional mood that enable the individual to experience different emotions, and as a result, better consider multiple points of view; and, utilizing emotional states which differentially encourage specific problem solving approaches (Mayer & Salovey, 2007).

Mayer and Salovey conceptualize "Understanding Emotions," the third branch of emotional intelligence, as critical in understanding an individual's emotional intelligence. This domain of abilities encompasses an individual's ability to label emotions and to reason with them at an effective, understandable level (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso & Lopez, 2003). Within this domain lies an individual's ability to label emotions and recognize relations among the words

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and the emotions themselves (such as the relation between liking and loving), interpret the meanings that emotions convey regarding relationships (such as how sadness often accompanies a loss), understand complex feelings (such as simultaneous feelings of love and hate, or blends such as awe as a combination of fear and surprise), and recognize likely transitions among emotions, such as the transition from anger to satisfaction or from anger to shame (Mayer & Salovey, 2007). Understanding precipitants that lead to various emotions is a critical component of emotional intelligence (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso & Lopez, 2003), and can be especially significant among teachers in a classroom setting. Recognizing that a student's annoyance and irritation can lead to rage, if the cause of the irritation continues and intensifies, can be critical in addressing and situation effectively on the part of the teacher.

“Managing Emotions,” the fourth branch discussed by Mayer and Salovey (2007), refers to an individual's capacity to successfully manage emotions when appropriate. Managing emotions refers to being open to emotional information at certain times and displaying the ability to stay open to both positive and unpleasant feelings, while, at other times, displaying the ability to remain closed to the very same information, in order to successfully manage and cope with emotions (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso & Lopez, 2003). This ability involves the ability to reflectively engage or detach from an emotion, depending on “its judged informativeness or utility.” This ability may be especially important in classroom settings, where teachers must decide whether or not to experience and express their own emotions to students in a number of given situations. Additionally, individuals adept at managing emotions might display the ability to reflectively monitor emotions in relation to themselves and others, and judge how clear, typical, influential, or reasonable these emotions might be. They may also display the ability to manage emotion in themselves and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing

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pleasant ones, without repressing or exaggerating information they may convey (Mayer & Salovey, 2007).

While this study does not attempt to measure emotional intelligence among subjects, the Mayer and Salovey (2007) four-branch definition of emotional intelligence is used in order to characterize teacher's behaviors into separate domains representing the different elements of the construct. In the current study, a teacher's behaviors within the classroom are divided into categories based on the four elements of emotional intelligence as defined by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2003): (a) Perceiving and Identifying Emotions, (b) Using Emotions to Facilitate Thought, (c) Understanding Emotions, and (d) Managing Emotions. The behaviors of outstanding and typical teachers within each of these categories of emotional intelligence are then rigorously compared to determine differences in how the outstanding teachers utilized elements of emotional intelligence within their classroom settings.

### **Positive Classroom Climate**

Positive classroom climate has been identified as one of the key factors in effective teaching, and strong correlational links have been established between teachers who are able to generate such a classroom environment and students' performance within these classrooms (La Paro & Pianta, 2003; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002, 2003; Pianta, 1999, 2003; Pianta et al., 2002). Indeed, researchers such as Bracey (2009) have noted that educational research should focus on the way in which teachers and students interact and the ways in which teachers structure learning environments in order to promote these interactions with students.

Despite the fact that a single agreed definition does not exist, "classroom climate" has been described as the perceived quality of the classroom setting and is viewed as a major predictor of classroom behavior and learning (Adelman & Taylor, 1997). According to La Paro & Pianta



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(2003), “An optimal classroom climate is characterized by low levels of conflict and disruptive behavior, smooth transitions from one type of activity to another, appropriate expressions of emotion, respectful communication and problem solving, strong interest and focus on task, and supportiveness and responsiveness to individual differences and students’ needs.” And, measures of classroom climate typically focus on a number of key features of positive teacher–student interactions within the classroom, such as teacher sensitivity in responding to children’s needs, positive classroom management strategies, and low rates of critical or over-controlling teacher behavior (Howes, 2000; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network [ECCRN], 2005).

Positive classroom climates characterized by positive and supportive teacher-child relationships and interactions have been shown to influence students’ psychosocial adjustment in preschool and later grades (Hamre & Pianta, 2005), and to improve student’s social competencies with peers (Pianta, 1999). This is especially important as students’ abilities to relate well to peers are especially important for adaptive school functioning and adjustment, as it has been shown to be an especially important area of social growth (Pianta, 1999). The development of children’s social competencies is associated with a positive classroom environment and teachers who provide a nurturing context for positive peer interactions (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebrook, 1992). Indeed, results from multiple studies have indicated that increased exposure to sensitive teachers and positive classroom climates is associated with greater teacher-rated social competence (Howes, 2000; Pianta et al., 2002).

In one study done by Wilson, Pianta, & Stuhlman (2007), the relationship between children’s social competence and their first grade classroom environment was explored using data from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, which revealed four distinct types of classroom climates (characterized by different overall quality of emotional and instructional

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supports). The study examined 946 students from 820 different classrooms which each fit within one of the four distinct types of classroom climates. The relationship between classroom type and student social competence (measured by teacher ratings as well as independent observations of behavior in and out of the classroom) was analyzed, and the possible moderating effect of the classroom on children displaying indicators of functional risk (attentional, academic, behavioral, and social) was assessed.

Results of the study indicated that children in classrooms marked by high-quality emotional supports and evaluative feedback displayed significantly better social competence than children in other classrooms, and that these effects were moderated by the type of classroom in which students were placed (Wilson, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2007). These results showed that high emotional and instructional supports in classroom settings can be effective in predicting relative improvements in children's social adjustment and functioning for all students, including those at greater risk, and support previous findings that an emotionally and instructionally supportive classroom environment may contribute to children's social development (Howes et al., 1992; NICHD ECCRN, 2005; Pianta et al., 2002; Skinner et al., 1998).

Classroom climate has also been shown to predict more effective self-regulation among students (Skinner, Zimmer, Gernback, & Connell, 1998), increased student engagement (NICHD ECCRN, 2005), and higher levels of academic achievement. An observational study of third-grade classrooms demonstrated that student engagement was positively correlated with positive classroom climate, as measured by global ratings of teacher sensitivity and positive classroom emotional climate (NICHD ECCRN, 2005), indicating that positive classroom climates, as well as teacher sensitivity, can be effective in promoting student learning engagement. Additionally, a study done by Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre and Pianta (2013) utilizing the Classroom

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Assessment Scoring System-Secondary tool in high school classrooms indicated that classroom climate is predictive of students' academic performance. In this study, multilevel modeling techniques were used with a sample of 643 students enrolled in 37 secondary school classrooms to predict future achievement while controlling for baseline achievement based on observed student-teacher interactions in the classroom. Results indicated that qualities of teacher interactions with students predicted greater gains in student performance on end-of-year standardized achievement tests, and that classrooms characterized by a positive emotional climate, teacher sensitivity to adolescent needs and perspectives, use of diverse and engaging instructional learning formats, and a focus on student higher order thinking processes such as analysis and problem solving, were associated with higher levels of academic achievement among students (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre & Pianta, 2013).

Additionally, positive classroom climates have been associated with lower levels of classroom discipline issues and student aggression. Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, and Pianta (2005) found that high classroom quality was most consistently related to a low number of management problems, and research indicates that classroom climates which are characterized by high rates of positive and supportive teacher-student interactions foster the development of self-regulation and conflict management skills, which then reduce student aggression (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Wilson, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2007). Researchers also suggest that positive classroom climates may reduce aggressive-disruptive behaviors among students in two ways: positive classroom climate teachers may tend to use more effective discipline and management strategies that discourage student misbehavior, and, these teachers may also use instructional techniques and modeling procedures to help students more appropriately manage conflicts, such as social problem-solving skills and demonstrate support for appropriate emotional expression

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(Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Howes, 2000). Positive classroom climate and subsequent decreases in student aggressiveness is especially important given that lower levels of student classroom performance and higher levels of aggressive incidents could predict a deterioration of classroom climate, or a “burnout cascade.” This deteriorating classroom climate is marked by increases in troublesome student behaviors and increased emotional exhaustion on the part of the teachers, as teachers try to manage these behaviors. In these climates, teachers may then utilize more reactive and excessively punitive responses that do not demonstrate self-regulation, inadvertently contributing to a self-sustaining cycle of classroom disruption (Osher et al., 2007).

### **Teacher Emotional Intelligence and Positive Classroom Climate**

The literature suggests that the harnessing of emotional intelligence (on the part of the effective teacher) can play a key role in contributing to positive classroom environments. Recent research has indicated that teachers high in emotional intelligence tend to establish good working relationships with students by being attentive to their students’ needs, as the results of one recent study (Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes & Schutz, 2012) indicated that teachers’ self-reported EI was negatively related to student misconduct, and that this relationship was mediated by teachers’ attention to student needs. These findings highlight the role of teachers’ emotional intelligence in shaping social interactions in the classroom. Further, projection of positive emotions, on the part the emotionally intelligent teacher, may aid in broadening behavioral repertoires and increasing student attention (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) in the creation of positive classroom climates.

Additionally, a considerable research literature appears to support the significant influence of effective teachers on the development of a positive classroom climate and desirable student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Though there is a lacuna of mediational research exploring how teachers utilize social/emotional competencies to create positive

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classroom climates, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) present a graphic model (Figure 1) to explain how deficits in teacher social/emotional competencies (SEC), a broader construct of emotional intelligence (see Brackett & Katulak, 2006; Salovey & Mayer, 1990, Zins, Payton,

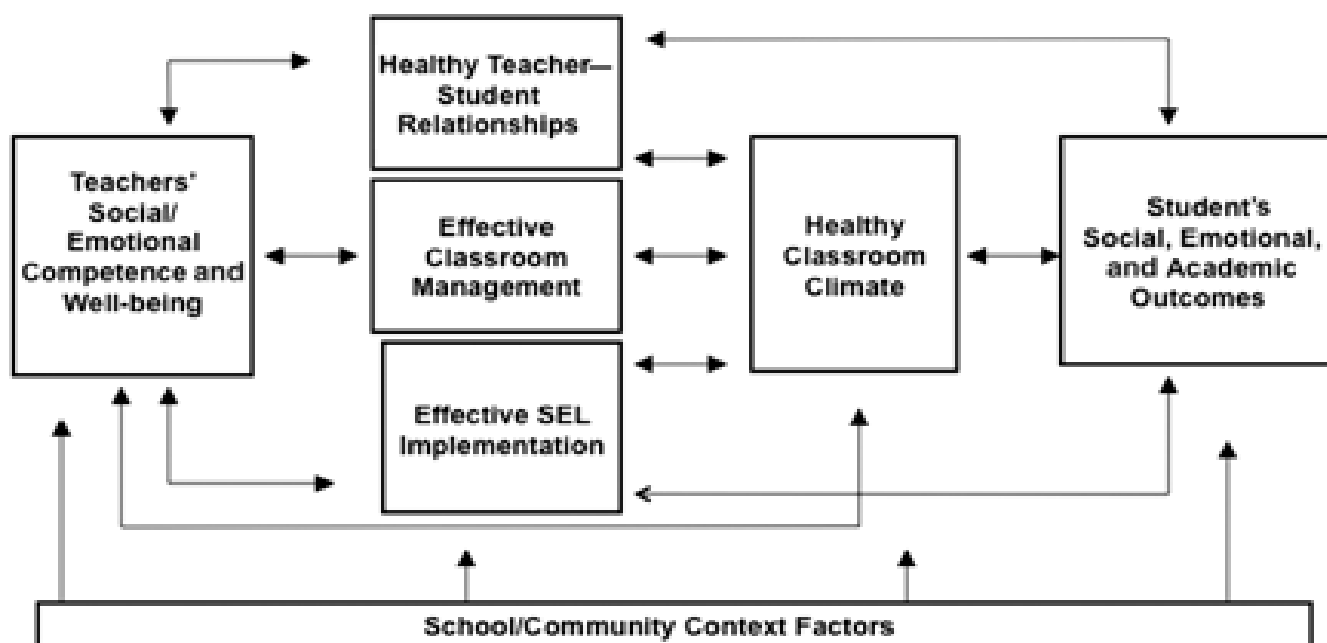


FIGURE 1. *The Prosocial Classroom: A Model of teacher social and emotional competence and classroom and student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)*

Weissberg, & Unte O'Brien, 2007), affect three key classroom variables: 1. Teacher-student relationships, 2. Student and classroom management, and 3. Effective implementation of Social Emotional Learning programs, which in turn mediate classroom and student outcomes. Jennings and Greenberg review a broad body of research from the educational, sociological, and psychological literature and establish theoretical and empirical links between teacher social/emotional competencies, the three mediational variables, and positive classroom climate. The model views teachers' social/emotional competencies (SEC) as an important contributor to

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the development of supportive teacher–student relationships, as teachers who are able to recognize individual student’s emotions, understand the cognitive appraisals that may be associated with these emotions, and understand how these cognitions and emotions motivate the student’s behavior may be able to more effectively respond to the student’s individual needs. According to the model, teachers higher in SEC are more likely to demonstrate more effective classroom management strategies as they can be more proactive in coping with student behaviors, may more adeptly utilize emotional expressions and verbal support to communicate enthusiasm and passion for learning, and may more effectively guide and manage student behaviors in class. Teachers with higher social/emotional competencies will be better able to effectively implement social and emotional programs for students in their classroom settings. Additionally, the authors conceptualize a transactional relationship between these three mediational variables and the outcome of a healthy classroom climate. These three variables help create a healthy climate, which in turn contributes to students’ social, emotional and academic outcomes, and reinforces teachers’ feelings of enjoyment, self-efficacy, and commitment to the profession, creating a “positive feedback loop that may prevent teacher burnout” (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

### **Current Study**

The current study aims to apply elements of the Jennings and Greenberg model to teachers’ emotional intelligence (a narrower construct of social and emotional competencies) and to investigate **how** a teacher’s specific use of elements of emotional intelligence influence two out of the three mediators discussed by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) - healthy teacher-student relationships and effective classroom management – to contribute to the creation of positive classroom climates. According to Jennings & Greenberg, research is needed on **how** teachers use

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elements of social/emotional competencies to create the healthy teacher-student relationships and effective classroom management variables that create positive classroom climates.

Further, the authors note that studying teachers' utilization of emotional intelligence may be a particularly useful way to understand individual differences in teacher Social and Emotional Competencies. Research has indicated that higher scores on scales of emotional intelligence are associated with higher quality interpersonal relationships (Brackett, Warner & Bosco, 2005; Lopes et al., 2004), stress tolerance and peer and/or supervisor ratings of interpersonal facilitation (Lopes et al., 2006), and a number of other positive qualities which could potentially impact the model's meditational variables.

Consequently, whereas there is research to support that teacher's social/emotional competencies do contribute to student-teacher relationships and classroom management, there is a paucity of research directed to *how* these competencies influence teachers' abilities to effectively manage their classrooms and create healthy relationships with students. For example, Jennings and Greenberg note that despite the fact that research has shown that emotionally challenging situations such as teaching difficult students and maintaining discipline in classroom settings are stressors that teachers frequently experience (Hargreaves, 2000; Kyriacou, 2001; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), little research actually explores *how* teachers' social/emotional competencies and use of emotional intelligence supports their ability to more effectively cope with these stressors, and regulate the accompanying emotions in order "to promote supportive relationships with their students and prevent and manage disruptive student behaviors" (Chan, 2006).

Additionally, although there is evidence that a teacher's warmth and sensitivity contribute to healthy teacher-student relationships and classroom climate (Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, &

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Bradley, 2002), little research has explored how a teacher's use of emotional intelligence (and social/emotional competencies) may be associated with greater positive affect and student and/or classroom outcomes. More research is needed to establish the relationships between specific dimensions of teacher SEC and the mediating variables of the model. The different ways in which an effective teacher specifically uses aspects of emotional intelligence to handle, manage, and negotiate emotions and relationships within the classroom, could be the distinguishing factors among "outstanding" teachers and their classrooms.

The purpose of this study is to: 1) qualitatively explore *how* outstanding teachers use their emotional intelligence to create positive classroom climates, and to understand the mechanism by which a teacher's emotional intelligence can influence his/her ability to create and maintain these climates; and 2) to qualitatively explore *whether* outstanding teachers use and manage emotions differently than typical teachers. Though emotional intelligence has been studied extensively, not much research has been conducted on *how* teachers utilize their emotional intelligence to more effectively forge supportive relationships with students and manage classroom settings in order to create positive classroom climates. The current research aims to study this utilization, using a method of observation and description. Because of the emergent nature of this research, specific a priori hypotheses are not warranted for how I believe outstanding teachers might utilize their emotional intelligence to create positive classroom climates. However, I predict that as compared to typical teachers, outstanding teachers will be more likely to perceive and articulate students' emotions, demonstrate awareness of their own emotions and control over these emotions, and demonstrate the ability to more effectively cope with the negative emotions of their students.



## **Methods**

### **Overview**

This study closely examined teachers nominated as “outstanding” or “typical” by school administrators and explored the ways in which each of these teachers utilized elements of emotional intelligence in their classroom settings using classroom observations and teacher interviews. All data for this study was collected within a two-month period from April to May of the 2013-2014 Academic Year.

### **Participants**

Participants in the study included eight teachers from one Orthodox Jewish high school in the New York area (350 students). One additional teacher from the school was randomly chosen to participate in a pilot interview before the study was formally conducted in the school. Of the eight teachers, seven were female (87.5%). Teachers were nominated for inclusion into the study by the school principal.

### **Procedures**

The principal of the school was given a blank piece of paper and asked to nominate eight “outstanding” teachers and eight “typical” teachers for inclusion into the study. The administrator was told that:

Outstanding teachers are defined as those teachers who are able to create a positive classroom climate, or a climate in which students report that they feel safe, cared for, engaged in the learning process, and excited/enthusiastic about learning.

The principal was told to keep the study purpose and teacher nominations confidential.

Both lists were then organized into alphabetical order, and I selected the first four teachers from each group (four “outstanding teachers,” and four “typical teachers”), and

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approached these teachers to inquire whether they were interested in participating in the current study. Administrator nominations were kept confidential, and teachers participating in the study were not aware of the presence of two distinct teacher groups within the study.

### **Measures**

**Unstructured Classroom Observations.** Two unstructured narrative classroom observations were conducted for each teacher. I sat at a desk in the back of the classroom and recorded all of the observed teacher's verbalizations and actions from three minutes prior to the bell ringing to signal the start of class to one minute after the bell rang to signal the end of class. These observation notes focused on observing the teacher's interactions with students before class and after class, all interactions with students during class, and responses to students' off-task or inappropriate behaviors throughout class time. All classroom observations were completed before any of the teacher interviews took place, in order to strengthen the credibility of the study's findings.

**Teacher Interviews.** One 45-minute teacher interview was conducted with each of the teachers participating in the study. A pilot interview was also conducted prior to the study and the teacher interview protocol was modified based on this trial. Interviews included questions asking teachers about how they work with emotions in their classroom in general, how they deal with the emotions of students in their classroom, and how they deal with the negative emotions of students in the classroom (See Appendix A). Teachers were then asked questions assessing their perceptions of emotion, use of emotion, understanding of emotion, and management of emotion within their classrooms.

In answering these questions, teachers were encouraged to provide short vignettes of specific instances in which they utilized the processes described in their answers. Interviews with

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teachers were recorded and transcribed in preparation for data analysis. The interviews were conducted in an empty classroom or office and were tape recorded. One interview was conducted in the teacher's room due to a teacher's physical disability that prevented her from accessing the office designated for the teacher interviews. The interviews were transcribed by two undergraduate IRB-approved research assistants and then checked for accuracy.

### **Data Analytic Plan**

Trends in the interview transcripts were assessed and explored through a systematic and intensely disciplined qualitative analysis of the data using both intra-case and cross-case analysis. During the data reduction phase of analyses, I closely examined each data source (observations and transcripts) for each teacher being studied and assessed the frequency of certain key issues and themes raised for each teacher. I then began with a basic framework of categories, based on research questions (the four basic EI abilities as defined by Mayer & Salovey), and searched for themes related to each category by going through transcripts and marking any statements or utterances that appeared to reflect one or more of the themes. I then developed a coding manual extracting the following six dimensions of EI from the teacher's answers to interview prompts: 1) Emotional regulation prior to class time 2) Emotional regulation during class time, 3) Reactions to inappropriate/off-task behaviors during class time, 4) Displays of empathy towards students 5) Emotional awareness and 6) Fostering relationships with students. Then, I reduced the number of themes to those which appeared to be the most prominent and important in the data, and subsequently used data displays to explore intra-case teacher analysis and then cross-case analyses between "typical" and "outstanding" teachers. As a result, I utilized a "method of constant comparison," (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to compare,

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contrast and to establish significant patterns, and then further question and refine these patterns as part of an ongoing analytic process.

During the conclusion-drawing and verification phase of the analysis, a doctoral level psychology graduate student “reviewer” was trained in the coding manual (Appendix B) and solicited to verify the analysis by reading the marked statements that had been coded with a theme from the teacher interviews and determining which, if any, of the themes these statements appeared to support. Only themes which were supported by both the initial and secondary coders were then included in the final, revised list of themes.

### **Results**

Data from interviews with teachers yielded six primary themes. These themes were then verified by an independent secondary coder, and triangulated with data from coded classroom observations.

#### **Theme 1: Outstanding Teachers Constantly Monitor Emotions in the Classroom**

One theme that emerged from the data indicated that outstanding teachers differed from typical teachers in the way they monitored students’ emotions in the classroom. Outstanding teachers all noted, independently, that they are constantly monitoring their classrooms, taking the “emotional temperature” of the classroom as a whole and of each student in particular, and responding to these emotions during class (n=4). Typical teachers did not describe engaging in this process at all throughout class-time. One out of four of the typical teachers actually said that she did not monitor the emotions in the classroom during class time, and three out of four of the typical teachers simply did not indicate at any point during the interview that they actively gauge the emotions of their students during class-time.

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This theme of monitoring emotions was highlighted by responses of outstanding teachers, who felt that consistently monitoring the class for emotions of students was a critical focus of their teaching. “The emotional antennas are up a lot in the room,” one teacher described (InterO03), “I feel like I constantly need to be aware of the different parts of the room, and where their attention is at, where their excitement is at...” This outstanding teacher explained that the material she is teaching is only a portion of what is going on in her head as she teaches, as she keenly focuses on many other elements of the classroom dynamics:

You know, there’s one class in particular that I’m thinking of- there are so many girls that don’t talk, and how to make them feel that I’m with them? You know, the girl in the back of the room who I know has so much potential, and she’s not enjoying school, and if only girls would like her more, and trying to whatever she says make it like it’s amazing, and really it’s just like this big juggling circus of, like, these personalities, and what they need to hear and what they want to hear, and who needs to be looked at and who needs to be validated, and who needs to speak now and who needs to read now. I don’t know... it’s just a lot going through the head, you know? Aside from the material that needs to be taught, you know (InterO03)?

Another outstanding teacher explained that she also tries to juggle teaching the material with gauging emotions of her students as she teaches. “I try to do both at the same time,” she explained (InterO02). A separate outstanding teacher also reiterated this point, highlighting how it influences the way in which she monitors the class: “I feel like I’m gauging it quite often in terms of, you know...the hands, their emotions on their face, um, when I see eyes wondering I know they’re not paying attention, so sometimes I can quickly just snap and say, ‘Stay here, this part is going to get amazing’ (InterO04).

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Another one of the outstanding teachers stressed a similar point, noting that she consistently changes the direction of her class, based on the emotional reactions she obtains from students: “I have to be honest, less of that happens when I’m preparing than when I’m actually standing there, by gauging their reactions” (InterO01). When asked how often she does this, she reported, “I think in an unconscious way, I’m doing it very often. Are they engaged? Are they not engaged? Are they thinking about their test next period or are they focused on me? Are they thinking about the fact that they have AP’s, are they looking outside that it’s nice weather and they really want to be outside? I think I’m constantly doing that” (ObservO01).

Interestingly, typical teachers most often did not describe any process of consistently gauging the emotions of their classroom when queried about how they manage and respond to emotions in their classroom. One teacher was even asked directly if she takes “the emotional temperature of her classroom,” in response to a comment the teacher had made in the interview:

Interviewer: In terms of emotions I guess in the classroom, like do you gauge emotions when the student walks in? How do you kind of take the temperature of the classroom? If you do...

Teacher- I don’t think I do.

Interviewer- You don’t think you do?

Teacher- I don’t think I do (InterT04).

Given the fact that teachers engage in monitoring the emotions in the classroom as an internal process, observational data from the classroom observation narratives was unable to either substantiate or disprove this theme.

### **Theme 2: Outstanding Teachers Express Greater Empathy in Response to Student Complaints**

The second theme that emerged from the analysis involved the different ways in which “outstanding” and “typical” teachers respond to student complaints when the teacher feels that these complaints do not have validity. All of the outstanding teachers interviewed ( $n=4$ ) described always empathizing with students’ complaints about personal life stressors, regardless of whether or not the teachers felt that these complaints were valid; by contrast, all of the typical teachers interviewed ( $n=4$ ) endorsed empathizing with students about stressors in students’ lives only when the teachers themselves felt that these claims were valid

Outstanding teachers reported that they consistently empathize with students, regardless of whether or not they agree with a student’s cause for complaint. “I always empathize with them,” one teacher explained (IntervO02). “You have to validate their complaints and you have to realize that what’s not valid to you might be valid to them,” said another teacher, indicating what she would do if a student complained about a test schedule that was set months in advance (IntervO01). Another outstanding teacher noted “I guess I should separate between the words empathize and validate. I always empathize. At least for them to know that I understand, I can repeat, not just in words, but like in my whole self.... I understand what you are upset and frustrated about” (IntervO03). These perspectives appeared consistently across the interviews with outstanding teachers.

By contrast, typical teachers across all four interviews indicated that they only empathize with students when they, as teachers, feel that the student’s complaint is valid. When discussing an incident in which a student expressed frustration about getting in trouble by engaging in an activity that the teacher disapproved of, one typical teacher noted that she would reply, “I think

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you did something really bad and you should improve your behavior and be much better”

(IntervT02). Another teacher (IntervT03) noted the following:

Interviewer: ...What if it's something that..... you felt was totally invalid...

Teacher- Then it's like: 'Tough get over it.'

When asked more about his response and thought process in such a situation, this teacher noted “You've got to be tough at the same time you can't just be soft all the time and emotional...you have to show them” (IntervT03). And, when discussing a situation in which a student went to a concert the night before an exam and complained about the exam's outcome, another typical teacher noted, “I would just tell them very simply that you didn't have to go to the concert. You made that choice and you have to live with it”; but, the teacher also noted, her attitude, and lack of empathy and helpfulness in response to the student's plight, might be different if that same student was at a family wedding the night before instead of a concert (IntervT04).

When attempting to utilize data obtained in unstructured teacher observations in order to examine convergence or divergence with the above theme, no specific data was obtainable that would either verify or disprove the theme, because it is not possible to discern during an observation whether a specific teacher perceived a specific student's complaint as valid or invalid. However, outstanding teachers were clearly more frequently empathetic with students during classroom observations. Notably, eight instances of teachers expressing empathy were coded among the outstanding teachers' classrooms, and no instances of teachers expressing empathy were coded in the typical teachers' classrooms. While the unstructured observations cannot be said to constitute a valid representation of teachers' behaviors in each and every class that they teach, it is possible that data from these observations point to an additional trend in



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which typical teachers not only empathize less with student claims that they perceive as invalid, but also tend to empathize less with students in general.

In one prototypical example of empathy among the outstanding teachers being studied, a student walked into the classroom during attendance-taking, looking visibly upset. The teacher immediately turned towards the student, and asked, “What is wrong?” with a serious look on her face. The student immediately complained about a test that she had just taken for a different class: “The test. It was awful. Each one was worth 10 points.” The teacher gave the student her full attention, speaking to her for several minutes and asking questions such as “There has got to be partial credit, right?” Only when the student began to laugh along with the teacher about a comment made by the teacher did the teacher move on with taking attendance (ObserO01).

In another outstanding teacher’s classroom, one student from a different class burst into class during attendance-taking. The student exclaimed, “I lost my black notebook (in this room) and I’m in big trouble!” The teacher appeared concerned. The teacher then surveyed the classroom, shouting, “Is that it?” when the teacher’s eyes fell upon a black notebook in the corner of the room. “Yes!” The student screamed. “A miracle!” the teacher responded. “That is the best feeling,” the teacher said, “I am so happy that you found it!” (ObserO03)

In another critical incident in that same classroom, the teacher introduced a program that she would be organizing for the grade, and announced the date of the program. The announcement was met with excitement by everyone in the class except for one girl. As the class filed out, the student said to the teacher “Oh no, my friend is coming in from out of town then...” The teacher stood next to the girl and looked at her. “Oh, no” she said, “That is so sad! That’s hard” (ObservO03).

### **Theme 3: Outstanding Teachers Experience and Model More Passion about Their Subject Areas**

Interestingly, both the initial and secondary coders indicated that three fourths of the outstanding teachers (3 out of 4), independently mentioned, at some point during the course of the interview, that they feel passionately about their subject area and work to model this passion for their students during class-time. None of the typical teachers (n=4) raised this point during their interviews.

Three out of four of the outstanding teachers described feeling intensely passionate about their subject area. One outstanding teacher, a bible teacher, indicated that her expression of passion in the classroom is one of “the most common things that students have reflected on...over the years.” She noted, “They don’t necessarily remember what I taught, but they remember that I was passionate about what I was saying” (InterO01). This teacher elaborated: “I feel strongly, I think these things are important...I’ve seen that these are powerful lessons that kids really need or take with them or are building blocks...”(InterO01). When discussing how she models this passion to her students in class, the teacher noted that, “There are four or five things I teach throughout the year that I just know are valuable lifelong lessons, and I will say, ‘This is the line to highlight. Wake up, pay attention, this is something that you’re going to want to hang on your fridge, that you’re not going to want to forget, that you’ll remember if you ever need it’ ” (InterO01).

Another outstanding teacher noted that she tries hard to use her passion about her subject area to bring her subject, Jewish History, alive for her students. “I’m trying to show them that it’s not something that just happened a long time ago, that it’s something that’s real and there’s something that could be applicable to them even now even though they’re 16 year-old girls

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living in Woodmere...Why some Rabbi who lived in Morocco in 1200 is important to them is real challenging. So, I mean I love history...I think it's really hard to teach anything without passion. I think that's the difference between a mediocre teacher and an excellent teacher" (InterO02). When asked further to explain how she tries to actively achieve this in class, this outstanding teacher noted: "I'm modeling. I'm trying to show them how you can find examples of everything that we're talking about pretty much daily, in the newspapers, in the blogs, and they can see it for themselves..." (InterO02).

Another outstanding teacher, who teaches bible, reported, "Most of the topics I happen to have related to more naturally, so I'm excited about it, you'll feel it, I'm a more emotional person so when I feel it, you'll feel it." Additionally, this teacher noted "... I guess I'll put it like this. There are two reasons that I went into teaching...and one is to give over that passion for the Chumash (Trans: Bible)" (InterO03).

During classroom observations of outstanding teachers, behavioral indications of teachers' passion for their subject areas were observed and coded. In one outstanding teacher's classroom, the teacher asked her students, during the course of the lesson, "What is the greatest gift a teacher can give to her students?" Students volunteered answers such as, "Dedication!" and "Knowledge!" The teacher nodded enthusiastically, responding, "Good!" as the students ventured answers, "But for me, the most important thing I can give my students is passion and feeling with the material that I am teaching. That makes an effective teacher. So who are effective teachers? They are people that give to you in that kind of a way..." (Observ01).

Further, outstanding teachers used expressive body language, such as shaking their fists (Observ01), jumping while emphasizing a particularly exciting point (Observ04), walking in a fast paced way around the classroom while maintaining eye contact with students (Obesrv02,

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Observ03, Observ04), and bending their knees to accent certain points (Observ03) throughout class. Such distinct movements were not present during observations of typical teachers.

### **Theme 4: Outstanding Teachers Engage in More Emotional Self-Regulation Techniques in Response to Frustrating Classroom Behaviors**

An additional theme emerged when comparing the responses of each group's reaction to frustrating classroom behaviors. All four of the typical teachers (n=4) described how they openly and clearly express their frustration to students who engage in frustrating classroom behaviors; by contrast, all four of the outstanding teachers described how they very consciously avoid expressing their frustration to those students, and, instead, deliberately engage in a processes of "checking" their own emotions of frustration in response to student behaviors. Interestingly, several of the outstanding teachers even described a deliberate process of emotional regulation in which they identified their feelings towards that student at that moment, but, instead of instinctively reacting and expressing frustration, actively put aside that feeling, and think pragmatically what would be the best way to deal with the situation.

One outstanding teacher noted that in response to a frustrating classroom behavior (specifically, an incident in which two students in the front row were laughing together during class, leaving the teacher feeling self-conscious and frustrated), she engaged in a quick process of evaluating and putting aside her own emotions.

"I have like 20 seconds - less than that. I have like a millisecond to assess is it something that I'm doing. Well usually the first thing is: 'Is there something on me?' Then it's: 'Is there something that I'm doing? Am I not being clear? Am I going too fast? Am I going too slow? Am I sounding stupid?' You know, like that kind of thing. And then the third is maybe there's something just like totally else that like okay they're just being teenagers, and I'll just take a

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deep breath...and I just move on....I'll just move on.” When asked what she does with that emotion in the heat of the moment, the teacher responded, “I wait for the teachers’ room” (InterO03).

Another outstanding teacher noted that “I think frustration is a bad emotion to show because it’s like not petty, but we’re not on the same level... like frustration is to like friends, like I’m not supposed to get frustrated by students,” and noted that, “I try to constructively get her to change her (the student’s) behavior without showing her that it’s bothering me” (InterO02).

Typical teachers, on the other hand, indicated that they often do choose to express their frustration directly to students, in response to class behaviors that they perceive as frustrating. For example, one typical teacher noted that in response to frustrating classroom chatter, she stops talking, tells them that she is stopping to talk, and then “look(s) at somebody (and) she knows that she did something wrong and she has to stop it” (InterT02).

Another typical teacher indicated that he currently plans to deal with a frustrating situation in which students complained about failing a recent test, by expressing his frustration in the following way: “We are going to have a ‘nice conversation’ about it because they have Regents coming up just under a month.” When asked what he meant by a “nice conversation,” the teacher responded, “A nice conversation that they better get their act together and get a step-up ‘cause I’m not going to tolerate...” (InterT03).

While utility of data from the unstructured observational narratives to substantiate this theme is limited because it would be impossible to assess teachers’ internal regulation of emotions such as frustration in response to frustrating classroom behaviors, both outstanding and typical teachers had students engaging in potentially frustrating behaviors in their classes during the observations. However, whereas outstanding teachers did not react to these behaviors with

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expressions of their own frustration, typical teachers repeatedly expressed frustration to their students during classroom observations, and 51 instances of expressions of frustration were coded collectively for typical teachers during classroom observations. By contrast, no instances of expressions of frustration were observed or coded during outstanding teacher classroom observations.

For example, in the classroom observations of outstanding teachers, teachers often responded to potentially frustrating student behaviors without expressing frustration. When a student in one of the observed classrooms (Observ001) stood up on a desk before the start of class to close a window, and almost damaged the window as it popped out, the students in the classroom responded with a resounding “Woow.” The teacher looked concerned for a split second and then looked down at her grade-book saying simply “Yeah...that was intense.”

In another incident with the same teacher, a student walked into class late, while the class was already paired into groups and engaged in group work. The teacher simply said, “Do you not have a pair yet? Do you need a pair?” and immediately paired her with a group, without displaying frustration in response to the student behavior. When another student in the same teacher’s classroom walked in late, the teacher once again did not express frustration, but, instead, smiled, put her hand on the student’s shoulder, and asked, “How are you doing?” The student immediately said, “I’m so sorry” and looked down at the floor contritely. The teacher smiled while looking at the student and responded, “Let’s pair you off into a group,” and proceeded to ask one group what they were up to in the assignment. When the students in that group answered, the teacher nodded and motioned for the student to join the group (Observ001).

By contrast, when a student walked in late during one of the typical teacher’s classroom observations, the teacher reacted with an expression of frustration. When the student walked in

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late in this classroom observation, the teacher looked at her with his brows furrowed, and called out “Hello?!” in a loud tone. The student said, “I know,” made a rolling gesture with her eyes, and walked to her seat (ObservT03).

Such expressions of frustration in response to student behaviors occurred often in the behavioral classroom observations of typical teachers. In yet another observation with the same typical teacher, the teacher reacted to a suggestion offered by several students on how to best review a worksheet by saying, “Okay. I will wait. Now that you are telling me what to do.” The teacher then frowned at the class and put her hands on the desk supporting her head. Later on in the class, one student said, “I left my thing at home!” The teacher looked at her intently for a few seconds. “You sat here until now without saying anything?!” the teacher exclaimed in a loud voice, staring at the student (ObservT02).

In another typical teacher’s classroom, the teacher frowned at the start of class, his brows furrowed as he looked at an empty soda can on an empty desk. “Whose trash is that?” he demanded in a loud voice, looking around the room. “Stick it on that chair!” he exclaimed (Observ02), Later on in the same classroom, when an excited student screamed out, “But the French always lose!” the teacher put his hand to his mouth and said harshly, “Shhh! Excuse me! Hold it!” Additionally, later on in the same classroom, the instructor attempted to pass around coins for students to examine. “How many have two out of three coins so far?” the teacher asked as he surveyed the classroom. “Not me!” a number of students shouted. The teacher’s expression immediately changed, and his voice grew louder. “Hey! Let’s move it!” the teacher shouted to the students. “Let’s go! Keep it moving!” he then said loudly with an angry expression on his face to a few students in the front row, motioning with his hands for them to pass along the coins (Observ02).

### **Theme 5: Outstanding Teachers Engage in Less Negative Classroom Management**

#### **Strategies**

Though outstanding teachers did not endorse expressing frustration to their students during their interviews, they did endorse utilizing several classroom management strategies in response to off-task and inappropriate classroom behaviors. However, ways in which outstanding teachers reported responding to these discipline issues differed significantly from ways in which typical teachers reported responding to these very same issues. In response to off-task or inappropriate classroom behaviors, outstanding teachers reported responding with humor or active ignoring, whereas typical teachers reported responding with confrontation, expressions of frustration, punitive measures (publicly embarrassing students or sending them out of the classroom), or threats of utilizing punitive measures.

All four typical teachers reported reacting with expressions of frustration or engaging in punitive measures/consequences and threats of punitive measures, whereas no outstanding teachers endorsed confrontation, expressing frustration, or engaging in punitive measures/consequences, or threats in response to student misbehavior. Instead, three out of the four outstanding teachers reported using humor, and one out of the four outstanding teachers reported using active ignoring to cope with behavioral or discipline issues.

Outstanding teachers consistently used humor to defray classroom interruptions and inappropriate classroom behaviors on the part of the students. As one outstanding teacher noted, “I try to diffuse things with humor” (InterO02), and another (InterO04) explained that in response to addressing off-task or inappropriate classroom behaviors, “I usually do it with humor...when I see the phone, if someone has a phone I know that the rule is that you are supposed to take it away immediately.... But... I’m like, ‘Oh my god, look at the phone! It is



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awesome! My five year-old daughter would want a new phone...Come on she would be so happy!' I think doing it with humor, I reach them more..."

Another outstanding teacher reported that she too uses humor actively to address inappropriate student behaviors in class. She described her strategy as "turning it into a joke while kind of giving mussar (Trans: correction/redirection) at the same time." As an example, this teacher laughed and noted:

There was a girl in one of my classes who asked me: 'Do you get along with your mother in law?' and I was like 'My goodness, I can't think of a more inappropriate question to be asking right now...' in my head...and like the girls looked at her and were like, 'What did you just ask?!' and she was like 'What? I just want to know...' And I was just like, 'You know what?'...like I turned it into a joke...but I was like 'I happen to love my mother-in-law, but I would never ask that again to another teacher!' (Teacher demonstrates smile as she explains her response)...and she laughed it off and she understood, but I guess the fear of hurting and turning her off, like scares me that I'd rather just turn it into a joke and her get the message that way (InterO03).

Additionally, one outstanding teacher (InterO04) advocated active ignoring in response to student misbehavior during class. "I've learned," she said "And this is only because this is my third year (teaching), that it's better to just ignore it..."

Conversely, interviews with typical teachers yielded very different approaches to dealing with student off-task or inappropriate behaviors during class. Many endorsed expressing frustration (see above) or taking punitive measures/threatening to take punitive measures with students who engaged in off-task or inappropriate classroom behaviors. The following was excerpted from one typical teacher's interview:

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Interviewer- You feel that frustration...

Teacher- Absolutely! Because they don't listen to you-

Interviewer- And what do you do with that?

Teacher- There's the door! (InterT03)

This same, typical teacher also noted that in response to student misbehavior, "I am very zero tolerant," noting that if someone in his class would talk, his rule is: "Warning, three times you're gone!" (InterT03) Another teacher noted that she may single out the student by announcing: "So and so is interfering with So and So's ability to learn (InterT04)." And, noted again later that, "What I would do, not always successfully, is raise my voice a little..." in response to classroom misbehavior (IntervT04).

A different typical teacher also endorsed singling out a particular student: "I stop talking and I look at somebody; she knows that she did something wrong and she has to stop it" (InterT02), and yet another typical teacher (InterT01), described singling out a student and expressing her frustration to students in order to attempt to control her classroom: "Definitely frustration, and I personally...I can't focus when there are little things like that going on. So I would call her name repeatedly. I call it whack-a-mole. You know the whack-a-mole where you have to whack this person then whack that? You know that's what happens sometimes with kids, like you call that person's name then you call that person's name then you call that person's name and when those things start to happen while you're trying to get your lesson. It's frustrating and finally you just, you know, just think I just said her name and I said, 'I need you to stop talking!!' "

This classroom management theme was also observed in coded classroom observation narratives, where typical teachers coded as responding to student behaviors with expressions of

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frustration 51 times, and engaged in punitive measures/warnings about taking punitive measures 12 times; by contrast, codes revealed that outstanding teachers did not engage in any of these behaviors over the course of their classroom observations. Instead, coded classroom observation narratives reflected that outstanding teachers responded to off-task or inappropriate classroom behaviors by collectively using a total of 14 humorous re-directive responses, and five clear instances of active ignoring. No instances of humorous re-directive responses or active ignoring were coded on unstructured classroom observation narratives for typical teachers.

Outstanding teachers were observed to use humorous re-directive strategies in response to off-task classroom behaviors in a wide variety of situations. One outstanding teacher, who interestingly did not actually express her use of humor in response to student misbehavior during her interview, noted with a smile at the start of class, when many students were missing for a variety of reasons, such as ongoing school projects, that “Maybe I should just stay home,” eliciting a laugh from the students present in the class and the students still walking in (ObservO01). Another teacher reacted to a student sitting on her desk speaking on her cell phone as the class began, by smiling broadly and saying, “Rebecca! \* (\*Student’s name changed) Hi! How are you?” The student looked at the teacher, smiled at the teacher and hung up her phone. “You must not have seen me come in- I slipped in,” the teacher said, and promptly moved on to the class agenda for the day, causing Rebecca to giggle and slide into her chair (ObservO02).

Later, when students in the class complained about a project due date, the teacher smiled and said, “Who doesn’t want to do it at all!?” to which the students all laughed and raised their hands high in the air (ObservO02). In yet another outstanding teacher’s classroom, in the school’s computer lab, a student began discretely eating a bag of cut-up watermelon under the table as she worked on a group project during group time, even though signs in the lab clearly

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delineated that eating was not permitted in the lab. The teacher, walking around to assist different groups, looked at the other side of the classroom with a smile and said, as she made other announcements about the project, “And there are no watermelons in the computer room!” The girl smiled and looked to her right and left, as if looking see if anyone else had noticed, before stashing the pieces of watermelon into her bag with a giggle (ObservO03).

In the classroom of the fourth observed outstanding teacher, the teacher’s use of humor in response to student off-task or inappropriate behavior was especially pronounced (ObservO04). When one student took out her Epi-Pen to show to a friend, the teacher looked right over at the student and then walked over to them. “Oh, no!” she exclaimed, with a worried expression on her face, expressing the hope that the student was not going to have an allergic reaction, right then and there, on the spot, in her class. “This is not happening in my class!” she said dramatically, as the students laughed and put the Epi-Pen away (ObservO04).

Additionally, outstanding teachers also used instances of active ignoring in response to student off task or inappropriate classroom behavior. One teacher ignored a group of two students talking in the back of the class for a period of one minute, after which the students quieted down (ObservO03), and another teacher reacted to a girl walking into the classroom late by not acknowledging the fact that the student walked in late at all (ObservO01). When one student walked in late during a silent “do-now” assignment, in another outstanding teacher’s class, after which the class erupted in shouts of “Happy Birthday!” to the girl who had just walked in, the teacher completely ignored this universal classroom disruption. The students looked at the teacher and then went back to completing the silent do-now assignment written on the board (ObservO04).

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Typical teachers, on the other hand, frequently used expressions of frustration, punitive measures or threats of punitive measures in response to student off-task or inappropriate classroom behavior during classroom observations. For example, in one typical teacher's classroom the computer in the front corner of the classroom began to operate as though it were being manipulated remotely, and the cursor mysteriously moved around the screen to the start button, seemingly on its own. The teacher, noticing that students were looking at the computer and pointing it out to other students in the classroom, told the class, "Do not look at the computer" in a serious voice. "Whoever looks at the computer will be sent out" (ObservT02).

In one typical teacher's classroom, the teacher told the students to look at a map in the front of the classroom depicting Italy. "Papal?" one student said, unsure of a word she was copying down from the board. "No! Papal!" the teacher said in an angry voice, "You should look (more) at the map." The student responded "Papal?" "Yes." The teacher said, "Now you are looking at the map. You have your brains working instead of your chatter" (ObservT03).

### **Theme 6: Outstanding Teachers Use Student-focused Techniques Rather than Self-revelation to Forge Relationships with Students**

Although teachers from both groups described relationships with students as being important to their teaching, teachers from the two different groups reported different ways in which they attempt to foster these important relationships with their students. Interestingly, typical teachers described engaging in self-revelation (sharing stories about themselves and their own lives) in order to most effectively build relationships with students, whereas outstanding teachers described engaging in student-focused activities, such as commenting on a student's new haircut, leaving a note or Hershey kiss for a struggling student, or making the child feel special or important when they answer questions in class. Three out of four outstanding teachers

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described using “student-focused” strategies to build relationships with students, whereas three out of the four of the typical teachers described fostering these relationships via teacher self-revelation.

Outstanding teachers consistently described using student-focused methods to build relationships with students. One teacher described going to the extent of actually doing some research, in advance, to find out what each of her students had done over the summer; in this way, she would be able to ask specific students how they liked specific activities, during attendance-taking on the first day back to school. When students talk about a celebration in the family such as a brother’s wedding, this teacher said that she would always ask to see pictures of the big event. Additionally, she expanded, “Anybody who gets a haircut, or has some very clear thing going on... balloons attached to their knapsack for their birthday or something, I’ll always acknowledge that kind of a thing,” she explained.

Further, this outstanding teacher also described including a special section on a test, asking students which topic in class meant the most to them that term, and then writing personalized comments back to each student, because, “I think that shows that I cared about what they were experiencing,” she said (InterO01). This teacher described that a large part of her approach is focusing on the student, both outside of class, when students share information about their own lives and burdens, and inside of class, when students contribute to classroom discussions. This teacher explained that during these discussions with students, focusing on engaging and connecting with each individual student, using eye contact, praise, and actual, sincere teacher interest is key in establishing a relationship:

I think what I said before, is that when you... you’re generally focused on the person, ‘I heard what you said, I have a genuine interest in what you said, and I want to respond to

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what you said.’ I think that’s true in life in general. You know, if I ask my son ‘How was your day at school?’ and I don’t make eye contact with him, it’s hard for him to think that I... and I really still am making my meatballs, it’s hard for him to think that I really care” (InterO01).

Another outstanding teacher similarly noted:

You know it’s not... I guess I’ll put it like this. There are two reasons that I went into teaching and one is to give over that passion for the Chumash (bible), but the other one was like 10th grade is really hard and I want them to feel good about themselves as a person no matter what I’m teaching. If I’m teaching science or math or history, I’d still have that second goal. And if I’m not in touch with where they’re holding emotionally, it would be impossible for me to know what to do to make them feel good about themselves. So that girl in the back of the room, who I know emotionally where she’s standing, I know what I need to do to bring her out (InterO03).

Outstanding teachers also spoke openly about creating relationships with students by letting them know that they are there for them, when students appear visibly upset during class. In the words of one outstanding teacher, “My dream would be for them, would be like when they leave my classroom, I was not just their 10th grade teacher... I say this all the time, like I love my students, you know? And I know they know that, and for them just to realize that...” (InterO03). Another teacher seemed to express a similar sentiment “I feel like I have to create a safe space for them to be able to talk to me...I try to validate their feelings, and hear what they’re saying” (InterO02) in order to create a relationship.

One outstanding teacher described approaching students after class to let them know that they don’t have to, but can, talk to the teacher if they wished; or leaving post-it notes and

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Hershey kisses on their desks the next day, letting the students know that the teacher was available to help or talk (InterO04). Another described never publicly singling the girl out in class or right after class as, “that draws a lot of attention,” but that, “I try to arrange a way to see her...I’ll try to find her later in the day in some way, and I’ll try and acknowledge that I saw that, and tell her she doesn’t have to talk to me about it, I just kind of want her to know that it was noted. It’s up to her if she wants to speak about it” (InterO01).

Typical teachers, on the other hand, endorsed utilizing self-revelation to help them develop relationships with students.

Interviewer - So what kinds of things do you do to develop that relationship?

Teacher - So that’s where the story-tellings help. Spending two minutes in the beginning of class telling a funny story, or having something, or one kid likes, you know, sports and I’ll tell a two second story that, you know, my husband makes me watch sports and, you know, that kind of thing, by spending that time you get 40 minutes the rest of the time; well we only have 40 minute classes so you get 35 minutes the rest of the time...”

(InterT01)

Another typical teacher related that, as a world history teacher, he often brings in anecdotes from his multicultural family or from his travels around the world to connect with students. “Most of these places I teach about, I’ve been to... I poke fun at the Italians, French, Germans... I’m English, it’s like you bring that in and it adds...constantly.” (InterT03). One other teacher said “I’ll tell them a humorous thing that happened like, you know, the story I mentioned with my son...When, thank god, I had grandchildren, and my daughter or my daughter-in-law was pregnant, I mentioned that. I mentioned, you know, I was going to take off for the Bris (Trans: Circumcision). Things of that nature, I’ll talk about. I haven’t talked about



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my husband as much as I've talked about my children, I don't know why exactly, but I think... well I'm thinking about it because my children are closer in age to them, therefore, more..."

Data from classroom observations indicated that both outstanding and typical teachers utilized stories about their own lives in their classroom settings. However, it is possible, based on data collected during the interviews and observations, to venture that while both groups engaged in levels of self-revelation during class-time, typical teachers told stories about themselves that were irrelevant to the course material, while outstanding teachers only used stories about themselves when attempting to illustrate a point relevant to the day's lesson. For example, one outstanding teacher gave an example in her classroom of briefing her own children to have good manners before going away on weekend sleepovers, in order to illustrate an important point she was trying to teach in bible class: that children are often seen as representatives of their own families. Students nodded in response, and wrote down the example in their notes (ObservO01). Another outstanding teacher described being called for character references of past students who had already graduated from the high school, in order to illustrate a point she was making about the connotations of certain words in the text the class was reading (ObservO02).

Typical teachers, however, in their interviews, described using self-revelation as a means toward becoming closer with students. Indeed, one typical teacher used self-revelation often throughout class. "Netflix! What a great invention!" she told her class, as she set up a movie to be watched in class "I didn't have one until I got engaged..." The teacher proceeded to tell the students, how the Netflix account, portrayed on the screen in front of the class, belonged to her husband (ObservT01).

Additionally, data from classroom observations indicated that outstanding teachers responded with excitement to student answers more often than typical teachers. Whereas,

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collectively, outstanding teachers were coded as displaying excitement in response to a student's answer or question during class a total of 43 times throughout the observations, typical teachers responded with excitement to student questions or answers during class a collective total of merely one time, and gave no praise in response to a student's question or answer during class time a collective total of 18 times during the observations.

It was clear that outstanding teachers consistently responded to student's questions and comments during class with interest, excitement, and praise. As one student asked a question, one outstanding teacher was observed at the front of the classroom, folding her arms, having full eye contact with the student, and nodding intently as the student spoke. When the student answered, the teacher pointed to her and pronounced, "Excellent," in a grave voice (ObserO01). In a separate observation of the same outstanding teacher, one student, answering a question, said, "Better is different, but different isn't necessarily better!" The teacher stood by the board, keeping eye contact with the student while repeating the quote very slowly, as if she was clearly thinking about each word, "Better-is-different, but-different-isn't-necessarily...better!" and she smiled at the student. "Deep. I like it. You heard it first from Rachel\* (\*named changed) here!" The class laughed and Rachel smiled broadly in response (ObservO01).

In response to one student raising her hand and asking, "Can I ask a question on a Passuk (Trans: passage)?" an outstanding teacher looked the student in eye and smiled as she walked over touched the girl's desk gently. "I would love to hear your question, Lea\* (\*name changed)!" The girl smiled, sat up straighter in her chair, and asked her question (ObservO03). As one outstanding teacher described in her interview "every once in a while they'll say something. I'll also like, I celebrate when they do that (InterO02)." Finally, in one outstanding teacher's classroom, one student made a comment in a heated classroom debate about characters

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in Jane Eyre. “Exactly! Of course!” the teacher said to one student, “we have a lot of evidence to suggest that!” Another student began to talk passionately about Rochester, one of the characters in the story. The teacher looked at the student and began to dramatically sing, “It’s a man’s world!” and the student laughed, and continued her train of thought. When the student concluded, the teacher began jumping up and down. “This is so exciting!” she said to the student “You are right! We can get into this!” (ObservO04).

By contrast, typical teachers often did not display excitement in response to student questions and answers throughout classroom observations. Teachers moved on with the material, corrected students’ answers, or expressed frustration to students. “Does anyone remember the case of X which dealt with districts?” one typical teacher asked her class. One student raised her hand, and ventured. “Race can’t be the predominant factor in drawing district lines, but it could be a factor.” The teacher continued her lecture (ObservT04) without acknowledging or reacting at all the student’s excellent answer. In another typical teacher’s Hebrew language classroom, one student raised her hand and attempted to answer a question in Hebrew. The teacher corrected her grammar as she spoke. “If you do that on the test I will take off points” the teacher said, looking the student in the eye (ObservT02).

Additionally, some typical teachers expressed frustration as students attempted to answer questions or ask questions in class. In one typical teacher’s classroom, one student raised her hand. “Would you just keep going and save your questions?” the teacher reacted, pointing to the student. Then he snapped his fingers and said in a loud voice to the class, “Let’s go!” (ObservT03)

### **Discussion**

Econometric studies have demonstrated that some teachers are dramatically more effective than others and that these differences in efficacy are not accounted for by traditional

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indicators of teacher quality, such as levels of education and certification (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005). While current research indicates that teachers' social/emotional competencies contribute to teacher effectiveness, student-teacher relationships, and classroom management, there is a paucity of research on how these competencies, and, more specifically, a teacher's emotional intelligence, influence and affect the ability of teachers to create positive classroom climates (Chan, 2006, Jennings & Greenberg 2009). This study sought to qualitatively explore how outstanding teachers use their emotional intelligence to create positive classroom climates, in contrast to typical teachers, and to understand the mechanism by which outstanding teachers' emotional intelligence can influence their ability to create and maintain these climates, using a method of observation and description.

Six primary themes emerged throughout teacher interviews and classroom observations, and each of the six themes related to ways in which outstanding teachers utilized elements of emotional intelligence to manage their classrooms and create strong student-teacher relationships in ways that were significantly different than typical teachers. Each of the six themes also related to previous research that has been done on teacher effectiveness and research that has been done on emotional intelligence.

### **Links Between the Themes and Emotional Intelligence Abilities**

Outstanding teachers, in sharp contrast to the typical teachers that were studied, consistently reported that they monitored the emotions of their students throughout class-time (Theme 1). The ability to monitor classrooms for emotions involves the ability to engage in emotional perception, or the ability to recognize and identify emotions in other people. More specifically, this EI foundational ability involves an individual's capacity to perceive feelings accurately, by not only paying attention to but also accurately decoding emotional signals in

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facial expressions and tone of voice appearance and behavior (Mayer & Salovey, 2007).

Interestingly, Salovey et al (2003) identify the process of paying attention to emotional expressions as critical in order to accurately appraise given emotions. As Denzin (1984) notes, emotional understanding does not occur in a step-by-step mode similar to cognitive understanding, but instead involves a process that is almost instantaneous. “At a glance,” he notes, individuals skilled at emotional understanding “reach down into their past emotional experiences and ‘read’ the emotional responses of those around them.” As an example, Denzin notes, “Teachers scan their students all the time, for example, checking their appearances of engagement, or responsiveness... (1984)”

Each of the outstanding teachers in this study noted that they consistently monitor their classroom by taking the “emotional temperatures” of students individually and collectively throughout class time, whereas none of the typical teachers expressed that they engage in this practice at all. This finding suggests that perhaps outstanding teachers actively use emotional perception, and even more specifically, utilize the process of paying attention to emotional expressions, in order to create climates that are more sensitive to student emotions.

Additionally, teachers’ abilities to effectively use emotional understanding to monitor their classrooms for students’ emotions can prove to be an effective element of the Jennings and Greenberg (2009) model, in that it is possible that by monitoring their classrooms and individual students within their classrooms consistently, teachers are utilizing their social/emotional competencies to both effectively manage their classrooms and create stronger student-teacher relationships (see Figure 1, p. 12). For example, research on positive classroom climates points to teacher awareness, and more specifically teacher sensitivity, as a factor that could be critical in predicting higher quality teacher-student interactions and higher relative student achievement

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(Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Hamre & Pianta, 2013). In one important study on teacher sensitivity and positive classroom climate, Allen et al. utilized data from observed teacher interactions with students in the classroom (coded using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary) with a sample of 643 students enrolled in 27 secondary school classrooms to predict students' future achievement while controlling for baseline achievement. Teachers who were observed to demonstrate sensitivity to student needs, to be responsive to student academic/emotional needs, and to exhibit other qualities of positive teacher-student interactions, consistently were predictive of higher levels of student achievement, even when controlling for baseline achievement (Allen et al., 2013). Teachers who monitor the classroom and display sensitivity to student needs may succeed in not only building stronger student relationships, managing classrooms more effectively, and establishing a more positive classroom environment, but also succeed in fostering higher levels of student achievement. As a result, it is possible that outstanding teachers use elements of emotional intelligence to consistently monitor and respond to emotions in the classroom in order to create the more effectively managed classrooms and stronger-student teacher relationships that contribute to a positive classroom climate.

Additionally, results of this study indicate that outstanding teachers consistently reported empathizing with students (Theme 2), regardless of whether or not they agreed with a particular student's cause for complaint, whereas typical teachers reported only empathizing with students when they agreed with a student's cause for complaint and felt that the complaint was valid. The ability to consistently empathize with students, regardless of a teacher's own feelings about the validity of the complaint, involves the ability to engage in empathetic perspective taking. Empathetic perspective taking involves the ability to skillfully comprehend another's feelings and to reexperience them oneself (Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka &

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Wendorf, 2001). Mayer and Salovey (1997) posited that this type of empathy is an important component or correlate of emotional intelligence, and subsequent research has documented that individuals with higher scores for emotional intelligence tend to also have higher scores on measures of empathy and empathetic perspective taking (Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey, 1999; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

This ability to engage in empathetic perspective taking involves a host of variables associated with emotional intelligence, including emotional perception and expression, or the ability to identify emotion both in other people and in oneself, and express emotions, as well as emotional understanding, or the ability to understand complex feelings, emotional blends, and contradictory states and feelings (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Moreover, consistent with the Jennings and Greenberg model, it is possible that outstanding teachers consistently use social/emotional competencies, and more specifically, elements of emotional intelligence which foster empathetic perspective taking, in order to consistently empathize with students and consequently, build the stronger teacher-student relationships that contribute to the creation of a positive classroom climate. For example, research indicates that the empathy of an advice-giver is an important determinant of whether the advice is perceived as good (Mayer, Gottlieb, Hernandez, Smith & Gordis, 1990), and that empathy is a motivator for altruistic behavior (Batson, 1987), indicating that those who feel empathy towards others might be more likely to engage in behaviors that more effectively “weave a warm fabric of interpersonal relationships” (Mayer & Salovey, 1990).

Additionally, empathetic perspective taking skills enable individuals to accurately gauge affective responses in others and choose socially adaptive behaviors in response. And, individuals who possess these skills are also more likely to be perceived by others as genuine and

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warm (Mayor & Salovey, 1990). Indeed, Carl Rogers posited that it is the active striving to understand others and empathize with them that is the key prerequisite in helping others grow (Rogers, 1951). Consequently, it is possible that outstanding teachers, who consistently utilize elements of their emotional intelligence in order to engage in empathetic perspective taking with students, help foster the stronger and more supportive student teacher relationships which help contribute to the creation of positive classroom climates.

Another important theme that emerged from the data involved how teachers felt about their given subject areas. Outstanding teachers expressed that they feel passionately about their subject areas and actively model this passion and enthusiasm for students, whereas typical teachers did not express either experiencing or expressing passion or enthusiasm for their given subject areas (Theme 3). Experiences of passion or enthusiasm about a given teacher's subject area are closely related to elements of emotional intelligence, because teachers who experience and express these feelings of passion to their students utilize elements of emotional perception and expression; and, they are able to identify their own emotions and accurately express these emotions to their students in the classroom setting.

Further, a teacher's emotional experience of enthusiasm and subsequent expression of this emotion in the classroom setting to his or her students may be an important contributor to a teacher's effectiveness as an educator. Teacher enthusiasm may also better enable students to engage in the lesson, reduce classroom management issues, and thereby enable teachers to create more positive classroom climates, consistent with the Jennings and Greenberg model. Teacher enthusiasm is a variable that has been linked to several indicators of teacher effectiveness such as student achievement (Brigham, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1992), test performance (Marlin, 1991), recall (Stewart, 1989), on-task behavior (Bettencourt, Gillett, Gail, & Hull, 1983), student



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attitudes toward learning (McMillan, 1976), and ratings of teacher effectiveness (Feldman, 1976). Additionally, one study examining college learning environments found that the most common descriptor of effective college teachers was "enthusiastic" (Lowman, 1994).

Additionally, studies on the effects of interpersonal cues on an individual's intrinsic motivation indicate that an individual's perception of interpersonal cues regarding the motivation of others toward an activity can affect the motivation of the perceiver (Cellar and Wade, 1988; Wild, Enzle, & Hawkins, 1992; Wild, Enzle, Nix, & Deci, 1997). According to this theory, a student's intrinsic motivation may very well be increased if the student feels that the teacher is intrinsically motivated about teaching the class. Additionally, Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn from one another via modeling, observation and imitation (Bandura, 1969). As a result, it is possible that teachers who model more passion about their subject areas may be teaching their students to approach the same subject area with passion and excitement as well. In one study, researchers utilized questionnaire survey data from 93 college-age participants and their teachers, which included measures of intrinsic motivation, vitality, and teacher enthusiasm; not surprisingly, the study concluded that enthusiasm was the most powerful unique predictor of students' intrinsic motivation and vitality. Additionally, in another study, varying levels of teacher enthusiasm (high vs. low) was manipulated in an experimental design with 60 college students. Interestingly, students who received an enthusiastically delivered lecture later reported greater intrinsic motivation regarding the lecture material and experienced higher levels of vitality than individuals who had received the lecture in which the instructor displayed less enthusiasm about the subject area (Patrick, Hisley & Kempler, 2000).

As a result, it is possible that teachers' abilities to exude enthusiasm about their subject areas is an important variable in the Jennings and Greenberg model, as teachers who use the

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social/emotional competencies, described above, to fully experience and then model enthusiasm for their subject area, may be better able to manage their classroom environments by facilitating students' on-task behavior (Bettencourt, Gillett, Gail, & Hull, 1983), influencing student's attitudes towards learning (McMillan, 1976), and increasing students' intrinsic motivation to engage more fully in the subject area being taught (Patrick, Hensley & Kempner, 2000). These abilities create more positive classroom climates.

Another important theme that emerged from the data was that outstanding teachers described engaging in more emotional regulation techniques in response to frustrating classroom behaviors than typical teachers (Theme 4). The ability to engage in a process of emotional regulation in response to frustrating classroom behaviors is rooted in the EI abilities of emotional perception and expression, emotional understanding, and emotional management. Teachers who are frustrated in response to student behaviors and wish to engage in emotional regulation, likely engage in a process of actively recognizing their emotions, understanding the possible consequences of expressing those emotions, and actively managing and putting aside those emotions relatively quickly. Salovey and Mayer (1990) note that the regulation of emotion is an important element of emotional intelligence, as successfully regulating emotions often leads to more adaptive and reinforcing mood states, and emotionally intelligent people are likely to be "especially adept at this process" and can "do so to meet particular goals" (p. 14).

The ability of teachers to regulate emotions may also fit into the Jennings and Greenberg model, as effective teachers must utilize social/emotional competencies, and more specifically the ability to use EI skills to self-regulate, in order to both manage their classrooms more effectively and to create stronger student-teacher relationships. Teachers who express less frustration with their students and model more emotional regulation may be better able to build

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stronger and more supportive relationships with students, and create more positive classroom environments. In these positive environments, students are more apt to not act in potentially disruptive ways. For example, when teachers do not have the necessary resources to effectively manage social and emotional challenges within a classroom, children show lower levels of on-task behavior and performance (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Additionally, as the classroom climate deteriorates, the teacher may become involved in a “burnout cascade,” with a deteriorating climate marked by increases in frustrating student behavior and teacher emotional exhaustion, while trying to manage these behaviors. Teachers in these classrooms may then begin to use more reactive and excessively punitive measures which not only do not model self-regulation, but also can “contribute to a self-sustaining cycle of classroom disruption” (Jenning & Greenberg, 2009; Osher et al., 2007).

However, it must be noted that it is possible that typical teachers expressed more frustration than outstanding teachers, because their students acted in more frustrating ways more often. This trend may point towards a transactional cycle and downward cascade model similar to the burnout model, mentioned above, in which teachers who engage in less emotional regulation and express frustration more often cause students to engage in less emotional regulation and engage in more frustrating classroom behaviors; these classroom behaviors serve to further agitate the teacher causing him or her to have even more difficulty engaging in emotional regulation during class time, and to engage in even more expressions of frustration during class time. Such a model may explain why teachers less skilled in social/emotional competencies may not only have a more difficult time managing classrooms, creating supportive relationships with students, and creating more positive classroom climates, but may also experience more burnout and job-related stress (see Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

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Consequently, it is possible that outstanding teachers differ from typical teachers in that they utilize elements of emotional intelligence to engage in emotional self-regulation instead of expressing frustration to students, and as a result, succeed in creating more supportive-student teacher relationships, better managed classrooms, and more positive classroom climates.

Outstanding teachers consistently described engaging in different classroom management strategies than typical teachers. Whereas typical teachers most often endorsed expressing their own personal frustration to students and engaging in punitive measures or threatening punitive measures, outstanding teachers endorsed utilizing active or planned ignoring, as well as humor, to redirect students, in response to off-task or inappropriate classroom behaviors (Theme 5). The ability of outstanding teachers to not only utilize emotional self-regulation, but also employ techniques such as active ignoring and humorous redirection in order to diffuse or decrease the occurrence of off-task or inappropriate classroom behaviors involves EI abilities such as emotional management; specifically, it involves the ability to monitor and reflect on emotions, engage, prolong, or detach from emotions, manage emotions in oneself and others, and attain emotional understanding, or more specifically, the ability to understand relationships among various emotions and perceive the causes and consequences of those emotions.

It is the continued use of these specific classroom management strategies that may, once again, mediate the relationship between a teacher's emotional intelligence and a teacher's ability to better manage classrooms and create stronger student-teacher relationships. By utilizing emotion management and emotional understanding to think pragmatically about off-task or inappropriate classroom behaviors, and to utilize humor or active ignoring instead of expressing frustration or engaging in more punitive measures, teachers may be better able to create positive

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classroom environments by fostering stronger student-teacher relationships and more skillfully manage their classrooms.

For example, research on planned or active ignoring, defined as “systematically withholding attention from a student when he or she exhibits undesired behaviors,” indicates that this behavior is effective in reducing incidents of undesired behavior in the classroom setting (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2006). Additionally, parent training programs such as Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), an evidence-based psychosocial intervention developed for families with young children with socially disruptive behavior disorders (Bell and Eyberg, 2002, Brinkmeyer and Eyberg, 2003, Eyberg et al., 2008, Hembree-Kigin and McNeil, 1995 and Neary and Eyberg, 2002) heavily emphasize active ignoring as a method with which to eliminate unwanted attention-seeking behaviors on the part of a child (Borrego & Burrell, 2010).

Additionally, research on the use of humor in the classroom setting has indicated that it can be helpful in diffusing unnecessary confrontations and tense situations in the classroom (Loomans & Kolberg, 1993). Humor has been identified as a promising teaching technique for developing a positive learning environment (Ferguson & Campinha-Bacote, 1989; Hill, 1988), and the use of humor has been shown to be effective in communicating implicit classroom rules and fostering greater understanding and rapport between the teacher and the students (Stuart & Rosenfeld, 1994). According to Wanzer (2002), the use of inappropriate humor creates a hostile learning environment which can rapidly make communications more tense between teachers and students (Loomans & Kolberg, 1993), or, inappropriately, cause a student to be the target of ridicule (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992); by contrast, appropriate use of humor in the classroom is a potentially effective tool “to correct behavior in a humorous way, without unduly embarrassing

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any class members, ” to communicate issues related to general classroom management, and build a sense of community while reducing conflict (Wanzer, 2002). Outstanding teachers, who use their emotional intelligence to not only engage in emotion regulation in response to frustrating in-class behaviors but also utilize tools such as active ignoring and redirection with humor, may succeed in creating the more supportive student teacher relationships and better managed classrooms that contribute to the creation of positive classroom climates.

Despite the fact that both typical and outstanding teachers noted that relationships with students were important to their teaching, teachers from the two different groups reported different ways in which they attempt to foster these important relationships: typical teachers described engaging in self-revelation (sharing stories about themselves and their own lives) in order to most effectively build relationships with students, whereas outstanding teachers described engaging in student-focused behaviors, such as commenting on a student’s new haircut, leaving a note or Hershey kiss for a struggling student, or making the child feel special or important when they answer questions in class (Theme 6). The ability to build relationships with students by displaying individualized concern to students during interactions with students hinges on EI abilities, such as emotional perception and expression, in order to identify emotions in their students and to communicate empathy, support, or emotional understanding. This ability can help teachers understand relationships between various emotions that their students may be feeling and help teachers understand the complex feelings being communicated by their students. Through this understanding the teachers can respond appropriately and engage in emotional management in order to manage their own emotions and the emotions of their students when responding to student needs inside and outside of the classroom.

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Moreover, teachers who focus on the individual needs of their students in order to build relationships with students are utilizing tools of transformational leadership, a leadership style closely linked to individuals with emotional intelligence. Transformational leadership is a type of management style that can inspire positive changes in those who follow, and transformational leaders are generally energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Research indicates that transformational leadership is closely linked to emotional intelligence, and managers who display higher levels of emotional intelligence also tend to exhibit transformational leadership styles (Cooper, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Megerian & Sosik, 1996). Additionally, a number of reviews and meta-analyses on transformational leadership (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1997, Gaspar, 1992; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Patterson, Fuller, Kester, & Stringer, 1995) have identified transformational leadership as an especially powerful form of effective leadership across a wide variety of settings and organizations.

Interestingly, a key component of transformational leadership is individualized consideration, which involves the extent to which a leader attends to the needs and concerns of his or her followers by providing socio-emotional support. This focus on attending to the needs of individual followers can often involve mentoring followers, encouraging them to self-actualize, maintaining frequent contact, and empowering followers (Harms & Crede, 2010). Outstanding teachers who closely focused on students' needs and wants when creating relationships with students, may very well have been exhibiting the individualized consideration exhibited by individuals who engage in transformational leadership.

Additionally, outstanding teachers who displayed individualized consideration when attempting to build relationships with their students, utilized their emotional intelligence and transformational leadership styles to focus on students' needs in order to create stronger student

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teacher relationships and build more positive classroom climates, consistent with the Jennings and Greenberg model. In addition, stronger student-teacher relationships may enable teachers to then more successfully engage in classroom management, because teachers who foster close relationships with students (Ertesvag, 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Gregory & Weinstein, 2004) and display feelings of care and set high expectations for at-risk students (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), may subsequently experience less difficulties with classroom management.

Supportive student-teacher relationship may be especially critical in adolescent classrooms, because adolescents are highly sensitive to the emotional rapport they establish with adults, and research indicates that developing strong connections with adults may be critical to maximizing students' academic motivations in the classroom (Allen et al., 2013), and enabling these students to attain long-term academic success (Allen, Kuperminc, Philliber, & Herre, 1994; Bell, Allen, Hauser, & O'Connor, 1996). Moreover, because, developmentally, adolescents tend to seek autonomy from parental figures, settings which provide opportunities in which these adolescents can receive emotional support from other adults may provide these students with the powerful motivation they need to engage more fully within these settings (National Research Council, 2004). As a result, outstanding teachers who utilize elements of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in order to display individualized concern for students, may be more likely to succeed in creating the more supportive student-teacher relationships and better managed classrooms that contribute to the creation of a positive classroom climate.

### **Putting it all Together: Two Overarching Dimensions of Emotionally Intelligent Teaching**

When examining the six themes that emerged from the data analyses, it is evident that they fit especially well into the Jennings and Greenberg positive climate model. Monitoring classroom emotions, engaging in empathetic perspective taking with students, modeling passion



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and enthusiasm, engaging in emotional regulation, utilizing active ignoring and humor and focusing on students may constitute key variables that mediate the relationship between a teacher's social/emotional competencies and his or her ability to create the better managed classrooms and stronger student-teacher relationships which predict the creation of a positive classroom climate. It is possible that teachers who use their social/emotional competencies, and more specifically, their emotional intelligence, to engage in these six processes are better able to create the conditions necessary for establishing a positive classroom climate.

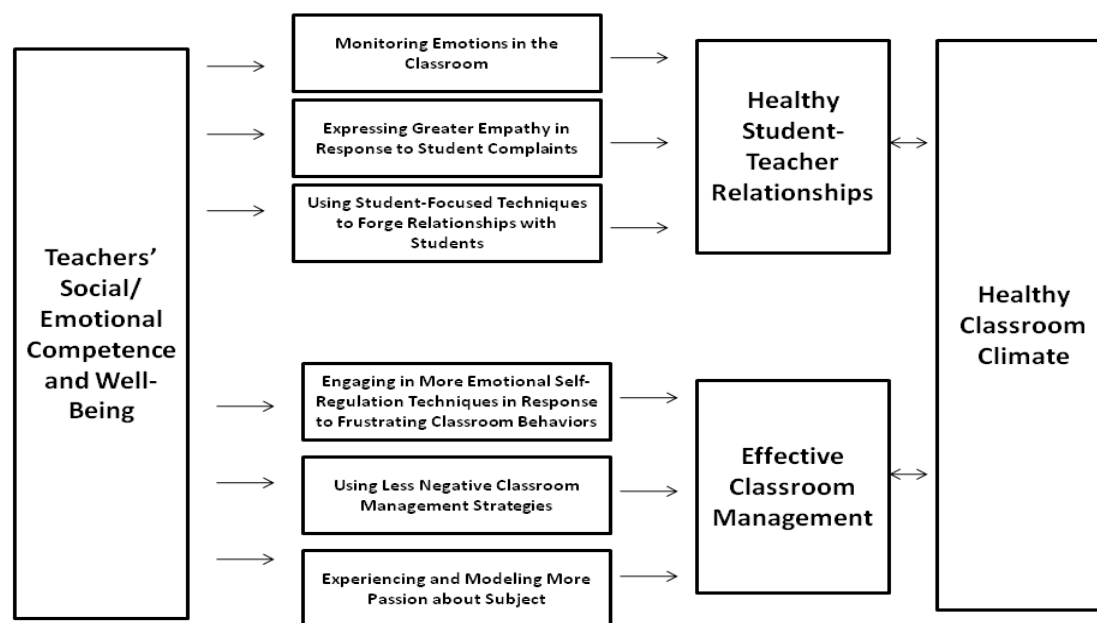


FIGURE 2. *The outstanding teacher's classroom: Teacher social/emotional competencies and the creation of a positive classroom climate*

Further, when examining the six themes as a whole, it is evident that perhaps outstanding teachers differ from typical teachers in two overarching ways: they feel more positively towards their students, and they feel more enthusiastic about teaching their classroom material.

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Outstanding teachers tended to have a more positive attitude towards their students, as they tended to attribute less hostility and maliciousness to their students and tended to feel more compassion towards their students, when compared to the typical teachers. Outstanding teachers, for example, tended to empathize more willingly with student concerns and become less frustrated in response to student behaviors. They also expressed genuine focus upon and concern for individual students, noting how they often monitored emotions in the classroom in order to gauge student comfort and engagement, and focused on students' needs and concerns in an effort to build relationships.

It is possible, therefore, that outstanding teachers may simply feel more positively towards their students, and as a result, engage in more positive and altruistic behaviors with students. Perhaps they are then less likely to make negative causal attributions about student behavior. Although some preliminary research has suggested that effective teachers display more compassion towards students (Walker, 2008) and generally display more optimism, life satisfaction, and grit (Duckworth, Quinn & Seligman, 2009), little to no quantitative research has explored the relationship between teacher effectiveness and a teacher's positive perceptions of students and feelings of compassion towards students. However, it is possible that more effective teachers simply feel more positively towards their students than typical teachers, and, as a result, are able to engage in behaviors that more effectively create stronger student-teacher relationships, better managed classrooms, and more positive classroom environments. Indeed, the social psychological idea of reciprocal liking, which describes the phenomenon of individuals tending to better like people who like them (Forgas, 1992), is considered a significant factor in the formation of friendships and interpersonal attractions, and may explain why teachers

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who feel more positively towards their students may succeed in engendering stronger and more supportive relationships with their students.

Outstanding teachers also tended to have a more positive attitude about their subject area, noting that they feel passionately about teaching their subjects and model passion and enthusiasm for their students. As discussed previously, teacher enthusiasm has long been conceptualized as a key variable in predicting teacher effectiveness, student achievement (Brigham, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1992), test performance (Marlin, 1991), recall (Stewart, 1989), on-task behavior (Bettencourt, Gillett, Gail, & Hull, 1983), student attitudes toward learning (McMillan, 1976), and ratings of teacher effectiveness (Feldman, 1976).

As a result, it is possible that in addition to a teacher's emotional intelligence, a passion for teaching and a positive attitude towards students can also contribute to effective teaching. Moreover, outstanding teachers may actually use their EI abilities to more meaningfully actualize or express their care for students and passion for the subject. For example, emotionally intelligent teachers may be better able to express their enthusiasm about teaching to their students by experiencing and expressing the emotion more effectively and may be better able to act in ways which communicate care and compassion to their students because they are better able to understand student complex emotions and then empathize with these feelings.

### **Study Limitations and Areas for Future Study**

The current study has several limitations that may impede the generalizability of the findings. These include the unique context of the field study (a religious all-girls high school), a small homogeneous sample (eight teachers), and a qualitative research design which precludes any cause-and-effect or statistically significant conclusions from being made. Additionally, because I conducted interviews and observations but knew in advance which of the teachers had

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been identified as “outstanding” and which of the teachers had been identified as “typical,” this knowledge may have subtly influenced the results.

Future quantitative studies might do well to attempt to quantify the themes described in these studies, by utilizing questionnaires or structured interviews, and then assessing whether these teacher variables mediate the relationship between teachers’ social/emotional competencies and abilities to build stronger relationships with students and more managed classroom settings. Future research might also attempt to examine whether these themes remain consistent among a larger sample of teachers and in a variety of different high school settings, including public schools and co-ed parochial schools. Further, future research that investigates how teachers’ positive perceptions of their students affect teacher effectiveness may be especially helpful in understanding how the way in which teachers view students, may impact a teacher’s ability to create a more positive classroom climate. Additionally, future studies may wish to utilize different methods of nominating “outstanding” teachers, such as nominating teachers who are able to demonstrate larger student test score gains from one year to the next.

### **Practical Implications for Educators and School Psychologists**

Despite the existing research and the current trend toward research that more closely examines social-emotional training for teachers in the classroom setting, researchers note that the “lack of recent empirical evidence has left educators without clear direction and understandings of what knowledge and practices teachers utilize in creating and managing socially complex learning environments” (Poulou & Norwich, 2000, p. 561). In order to fill this gap the scientific evidence must translate into practical training for teachers that provides them with the tools necessary to implement their visions for establishing positive learning communities and classroom climates (Poulou & Norwich, 2000). There also must be effort toward research that

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clearly links the data with professional interests and outcomes. This study attempted to redress these gaps.

Results from this study also may have powerful and important implications for teacher training and recruitment. The themes identified in this study that typify the differences between typical and outstanding teachers may lead to the addition of new and specific training activities during pre-service and in-service teacher trainings. For example, trainings and role-plays that focus on helping a teacher learn and practice empathetic perspective taking with students, or trainings and role-plays in which a teacher learns and practices using emotion regulation skills in response to frustrating student behaviors, could be very worthwhile. Moreover, programs such as “The RULER Approach to Social and Emotional Learning,” which have been developed to facilitate school-wide social and emotional learning for teachers and students (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes & Salovey, 2012), may be especially useful in helping teachers develop the stronger social emotional competencies that they need in order to more effectively manage their classrooms. Additionally, teachers may benefit from learning about ways in which they could learn to enjoy their subject matter more, or inspire themselves to be more passionate about their subjects outside of class, thus engendering more teacher enthusiasm and emotion in teaching their given subject area both inside and outside of the classroom. Lastly, teachers may benefit from behavioral trainings featuring classroom management skills exhibited by the outstanding teachers, such as active ignoring of disruptive behaviors. Such behavioral trainings might be especially useful given the fact that teachers who feel they have more tools to manage students’ behaviors may be less likely to feel and express high levels of frustration to their students. These trainings and activities, modeled on and based upon behaviors expressed and observed in

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classrooms of outstanding teachers, may help individuals advance along the continuum from typical to more outstanding teachers.

Additionally, results from this study may also be potentially useful in teacher selection, evaluation, and recruitment. Measures and questionnaires could be created that identify qualities of outstanding teachers, and include vignettes of common classroom scenarios in which respondents are asked to describe how they would react in a given situation. Examples of vignettes could potentially include situations discussed by the teachers in this study, such as a student complaining to a teacher about an issue the teacher feels is invalid, or a student engaging in a frustrating classroom behavior. These measures, along with general measures of social/emotional competencies and emotional intelligence, could be administered to teachers, and prospective teachers, to differentiate between those individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence and social/emotional competencies who engage in behaviors consistent with behaviors of outstanding teachers, and those who do not have the same skills and competencies.

Moreover, these results also have important implications for school psychologists who consult with teachers. School psychologists can encourage teachers to implement the behavior-management strategies used by outstanding teachers--such as active ignoring—in place of more punitive classroom strategies. They might also help teachers use more effective emotional self-management strategies when dealing with difficult classroom behaviors. In order to accomplish this, school psychologists can engage in psychoeducation with teachers about effective emotional regulation strategies and engage in *in-vivo* rehearsal of these strategies. They may also be able to show teachers how to engage in a monitoring system in which teachers track their own progress with these emotional regulation skills in the classroom over time. Additionally, school psychologists working with teachers in consultation may be able to emphasize the importance of

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creating strong and empathetic relationships with students and the role that these relationships can play in the creation of a positive classroom climate and the prevention of discipline issues.

Structured observational tools based on the six themes analyzed in the current study may also be beneficial in evaluating teachers. The answers teachers provide on questionnaires eliciting their response to certain scenarios may or may not closely match the manner in which the teachers actually react in a real life environment. These observations may assess for a teacher's expressions of frustration, uses of active ignoring skills, displays of enthusiasm, sensitive responses to emotions displayed in the classroom, responses to student complaints, and a teacher's focus on student issues in the few minutes right before and right after the bell rings to signal class-time. Such trainings and assessments may prove powerful in training, evaluating, and recruiting future outstanding teachers.

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Appendix A  
Teacher Interview Protocol

**Introduction**

1. Can you give me a few adjectives to describe your teaching style?

**Working With Emotions in the Classroom**

1. Can you think of a time in which you structured your lesson in a certain way in order to make your students excited or enthusiastic about a topic?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

2. Can you think of a time in the past few weeks that you displayed some of your own emotions in the classroom? What were these emotions in response to?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

3. Can you think of a time in the past few weeks in which you experienced an emotion while in the classroom but consciously decided not to display this emotion to your students?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

4. Can you think of a time in the past few weeks in which you consciously tried to make a topic funny or humorous for your students?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

5. Can you think of a time in which you utilized classroom emotions (i.e. shared student frustration, disappointment about a school rule, or sadness about a recent community tragedy) to make a certain powerful or interesting point while teaching?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

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### Dealing With the Emotions of Students in the Classroom

1. Was there ever a class period in this past year in which you picked up on what your students were feeling as they entered the class and then tailored the class agenda for the day to at least partly address the current issue or concern?
  - a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)
2. Was there ever a time in which you noticed what the class as a whole was feeling on a certain day and articulated it out loud?
  - a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)
3. Can you think of a specific incident in which you 1. noticed that a student, or the class as a whole, displayed specific interest or enthusiasm about a topic and, 2. as a result subsequently harnessed that excitement or went into the topic in more depth about that topic than you may have otherwise planned?
  - a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)
4. Can you think of a time during the past few weeks that most of your class seemed really anxious or nervous about a particular issue (i.e. exams, workload, school performance tryouts, SAT exams)? How did you deal with this situation?
  - a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)
5. How often do you take time to gauge the emotions of your students as they enter your classroom? What do you choose to do in response?
  - a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

### Dealing with the Negative Emotions of Students in the Classroom

1. Can you think of a time, in the past few weeks, that one of your students seemed upset, agitated, or appeared to be struggling with a specific topic during class? (How, if at all, did you respond?)
  - a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

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2. Can you think of a time in the past year in which a student made an angry, rude, or inappropriate comment during class? How did you deal with this behavior?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

3. Can you think of a time in which a student made a personal or personally hurtful comment to you during class? How did you respond?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

4. Can you think of a time in the past few weeks that the whole class became heated or angry about a specific issue (wanting to change the date of an exam, complaining about an “unfair” course requirement)? How did you deal with this situation?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)

5. Can you think of a time in the past few weeks that the entire class seemed really worn out, “down in the dumps” and upset upon entering the classroom? How did you respond?

- a. Can you describe the specific incident/incidents? (Ask follow up questions like this one to generate one or more short vignettes.)



Appendix B  
Teacher Transcripts Coding Manual

**1. Teachers managing their own emotions before class:**

***CHECK-IN-R**-Teacher engages in “check in ritual” before class*

***AWARE-E**-Teacher describes awareness of own emotions*

***Put-E**-Teacher describes a conscious “putting aside of own emotions”*

***BE/E**- Teacher reports that he/she does bring his/her own emotions about life stressors into class, and does experience/express these emotions in class*

***BE/DNE**- Teacher reports that he/she does bring his/her own emotions about life stressors into class, and experiences emotions in class, BUT does not express these emotions in class.*

***ECD**- Teacher reports that own experiences of emotions in class occasionally does effect the classroom dynamics*

**2. In response to frustrating class behaviors...:**

***ExF**-Teachers express frustration to students in response to frustrating class behaviors*

***Conseq**-Teachers give consequences to students in response to frustrating class behaviors*

***CheckE**-Teachers describe “checking” and putting aside their own emotions in response to frustrating class behaviors*

***Pragmat**-Teachers describe a process of pragmatically considering the best way to deal with the situation in response to frustrating class behaviors*

**3. When reacting to discipline issues, the teacher....:**

***Act-Ign**-Reacts to discipline issues using active ignoring*

***Humor**-Reacts to discipline issues using humor to redirect students*

***Redir**-Reacts to discipline issues using redirective strategies only*

***Puniti**-Reacts to discipline issues using punitive strategies*

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### 4. When students complain about issues in their lives before class...:

***EmpValid***-When student complain about issues in own lives before class, Teacher displays empathy to students only when Teacher feels complaints are valid

***EmpAlways***-When student complain about issues in own lives before class, Teacher displays empathy to students whether or not Teacher feels complaints are valid (even if they would then provide "a bigger picture" to students about the issue that was bothering them).

### 5. Taking the “Emotional Temperatures” of their classrooms:

***Const***-Teacher notes that throughout class, he/she is constantly taking the "emotional temperature" of their classroom and shifting/planning out their next move accordingly

***NotConst***-Teacher notes that throughout class, he/she does not actively take the emotional temperature of their class (but may cope with student's major displays of emotions as they come up throughout class)

### 6. Having relationships with students:

***Rela***: Teacher reports that having relationships with students is important to his/her teaching.

### 7. Ways in which teachers foster relationships with students-

***Self-revel***-Teacher describes that his/her relationships with students are fostered via self-revelation (cute stories about family, own personal background or discussion of own political views and life experiences etc)

***Stud-Focus***-Teacher describes that he/she builds relationships with students by doing things which seem to focus on student's needs (complimenting and noticing a student's new haircut, doing research to find out where student went for camp in summer and then asking them how it was, leaving post-it notes or Hershey kisses for them when they seem upset letting them know that they are there for them, etc.)

### 8. Passion about Subject Area:

***Pass/SA***-Teacher describes being passionate about subject area

***ModelsPass/SA***- Teacher actively/consciously models passion for students