



## Collaboration Between Two Schools of Nursing: Emotional Intelligence Education for Prelicensure Students<sup>1</sup>



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### ABSTRACT

Faculty and nurse administrators have a duty to provide future nurses both educational development and the professional expectations of nurses in health care settings to sustain the quality of care outcomes for members of the community. The purpose of this collaborative project between 2 schools of nursing was to provide emotional intelligence education to prelicensure nursing students while cultivating relationships with local community partners.

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### Introduction

Developing professionalism and collaboration skills through education is an expectation of health professionals and their students. Faculty and clinical preceptors channel this expectation through direct instruction, modeling, coaching, and facilitating interactions in health care environments. Nursing is a challenging profession with most schools of nursing requiring the development of professionalism in their graduates as an accreditation standard ([American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2017](#)). This is in addition to nurses being able to function optimally toward therapeutic relationships practice ([Maxwell, 2017](#)) and learning a broad range of skills, which include the ability to operate technologically advanced medical equipment, work in a multidisciplinary team, and adapt to the constantly changing health care environment ([Ranjbar, 2015](#)). According to [Delunas and Rouse \(2014\)](#), improved communication and collaboration are the two most important outcomes of interprofessional development.

### Purpose

This descriptive article serves to promote the value of instilling Emotional Intelligence (EI) in nursing education for optimal communication within health care disciplines as supported by evidence-

based practice. The purpose of this collaborative project between two schools of nursing was to provide EI education to prelicensure nursing students while cultivating relationships with local community partners.

### Background

Universities and schools/colleges share responsibility for orienting students to the reality of working in a health care setting ([Rush, Shepherd, Firth, & Marks-Maran, 2013](#)). Nursing faculty face challenges not only in teaching professionalism to students but also in improving incorporation/evaluation of student professionalism in their program to meet accreditation standards ([Rees, Monrouxe, & Ajjawi, 2014](#)). Because nurses serve the needs of the local community, they should be mindful of a patient's emotional state and their own and remain calm to make critical decisions during times of intense stress. This type of mindfulness and presence requires EI and critical thinking ([Atay, Ekim, Gökkaya, & Sağım, 2009](#); [Heffernan, Quinn Griffin, McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010](#)). EI is defined as the ability to comprehend one's own feelings and those of others, make choices among them, and utilize the derived knowledge in subsequent actions ([Salovey & Mayer, 1990](#)). According to [Goleman \(1995\)](#) who introduced the five key elements of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, EI has become more valuable than an IQ score (see [Table 1](#)). Introducing activities that promote reflection is key to developing EI ([Fitzpatrick, 2016](#)). Studies have shown a positive correlation between safe nursing practice and EI in communication skills ([Altunas & Akyil, 2011](#); [Beauvais,](#)

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**Table 1**  
Five EI key elements

1. Self-awareness	Emotional awareness: the ability to understand personal emotions and how they impact others.
2. Self-regulation	Emotional control: the ability to redirect disruptive impulses and think before taking action.
3. Motivation	Perseverance: the ability to face obstacles and achieve goals with energy.
4. Empathy	Sensing and understanding the emotions of others: anticipate the needs of others.
5. Social skills	Managing relationships: the ability to listen and respond appropriately to others.

Note. Brief description of EI elements from American Psychologist, Daniel Goleman (1995). Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ. New York: Bantam Books.

Brady, O'Shea, Griffin, & Quinn, 2011). The Joint Commission (2013) has identified inadequate leadership and poor communication skills as the most recurrent root causes of sentinel events. Parnell and St. Onge (2015) impart EI as a critical attribute shown to have positive behavioral outcomes, which leads to safer nursing practice. Moreover, nurses need EI education to foster improved communication, support effective practice, and enhance their interactions with health care recipients, family members, and all individuals within the health care organizations (Fitzpatrick, 2016). The nursing profession is just starting to understand the importance of EI in professional nurses who must think critically, collaborate with interprofessional teams, and maneuver through complex and sometimes nebulous situations (Smith, 2016). Results of a recent study of nurses found higher levels of EI and empathy were associated with reduced fatigue and burnout (Beauvais, Andreychik, & Henkel, 2017). Because of the demands on a professional nurse, the skill set of EI is necessary to maintain self-control and foster inner strength to navigate the complex health care environment (Smith, 2016). In an integrative review from 1995 to 2017, researchers convey evidence of the connections between EI in nurses and the positive impact upon caring behaviors (Nightingale, Spiby, Sheen, & Slade, 2018). Education related to EI appears to offer health care professionals a vehicle to gain greater recognition of the patient experience and perspective.

Collaborative teamwork and cultural competence have been identified as critical values for practicing nurses to provide quality care (Judge, Murray, Hughes-Gay, & Robinson, 2016; Smith & Tremethick, 2013). The groundwork for collaborative efforts and teamwork should start in schools of higher education with all members of the health care team, especially nursing (Griffiths, 2018). Health care teams working closely together to provide safe, high-quality care in a compassionate manner are prized in the medical community. Emotionally intelligent leadership is necessary to support the health care team as a collaborative unit in order to maintain high standards of care (Carragher & Gormley, 2017).

### Teaching Strategy of EI Introduction

In this project, two midwest schools of nursing in the United States that provide different educational tracks for prelicensure nursing (associate of science in nursing degree at a local community college and bachelor of science in nursing degree from the state university) developed a collaborative relationship around EI education with prelicensure students. This effort allowed for resource sharing with community experts, encouraged standardized critical thinking, and provided continuity in monitoring student-learning outcomes related to educational content. Such collaborative actions influence a student's approach to learning and positively impacts undergraduate learning program outcomes (Beauvais, Stewart, DeNisco, & Beauvais, 2014). Essential partnerships between faculty and community educators have been reported to enrich student

learning and maximize student outcomes in and out of the classroom (Por, Barriball, Fitzpatrick, & Roberts, 2011). Although the purpose of this project was to implement student professional education focused on EI, the coordination and cultivation of relationships between the schools of nursing and community partners was a fortuitous outcome as well.

Nine faculty members from the two schools of nursing formed a committee and held monthly meetings throughout the year-long process. A timeline was developed and adjusted as needed with tasks relegated as necessary throughout the planning year. Faculty reached out to community partners to gain insight into needed areas for educational topics. The feedback received from local clinical partners and employers provided insight into the program topic, which was *Nursing Professionalism: The Importance of Emotional Intelligence*. Program objectives were to unite prelicensure students from the two different nursing schools who may ultimately practice at the same community organizations, introduce EI, and cultivate relationships among faculty from both campuses.

EI, the educational topic for the student professional development event, pertains to the capacity of a health care professional to recognize the feelings of others in their surroundings and respond appropriately. Schools of nursing are called to focus on developing social awareness and social skills as this will influence the care students deliver during their education and throughout their career (Heffernan et al., 2010). Recent studies indicate a strong correlation between professional competence and EI (Beauvais et al., 2014; Por et al., 2011). Therefore, the keynote presenters invited to the event helped plan the EI curriculum with faculty and included four breakout session speakers with each presenting one of the four prominent areas of EI: relationship management, social awareness, self-management, and self-awareness. The speakers were experienced professionals from the community and had a background in providing education to regional nurse clinicians. The full-day event included a lunchtime activity that promoted student/vendor interaction and a closing session, which included evaluations and drawings for donated gifts.

### Evaluation of Student Experience

A descriptive review on nursing students' perceptions of EI in nursing education was evaluated by disseminating questionnaires containing less than 10 questions to approximately 200 students. Mixed-method reporting was gleaned from 173 students who completed the questionnaires. Students were mostly female (96%) with an age range of 19–39 years for both male and female students. Feedback from the event was compiled via a satisfaction questionnaire and included qualitative comments from students for review of prior education, education event satisfaction, and viewpoints of the educational event.

Study participants consisted of 200 undergraduate students in two separate prelicensure nursing programs. Students' evaluations revealed that 93% reported they experienced no prior training related to EI, whereas only 7% reported having EI-related content in other professional development venues. This staggering statistic confirmed faculty and community partners' initial views suggesting the necessity for the EI topic. Although EI is not a new concept (it was first promoted in 1995 by Daniel Goleman), educators are failing to implement evidenced-based research strategies that develop leadership and communication skills, which, according to The Joint Commission (2013), may “hold the key for creating safer health care climates (Parnell & St. Onge, 2015, p. 88).

Students expressed mean averages of 94% satisfaction level with the EI education content and 91% or greater in their satisfaction with community presenters at the completion of the education event. The outcomes with satisfaction confirmed faculty thoughts about lack of student exposure to EI education. A postevent meeting

with faculty provided valuable input and reflection that conveyed appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate with faculty from another school of nursing and eagerness for the continuance to nurture and further develop the relationship.

There were a few prominent patterns to the student open comments section for qualitative feedback. One third of the students reported thinking that the education around EI was something needed in the curriculum prior to clinicals in the community. In addition, they reported the need to have the EI education woven throughout the overall curriculum for both programs. The majority reported that, although they never received EI education, they now have a better understanding of their personal social skills. Students also responded they enjoyed the case studies in the individual presentations but would have liked more hands-on applications of the concepts in utilizing these new skills. One student comment summarized a majority of the students' viewpoints by stating, "The material presented by the speakers made me think about the whole picture in healthcare and not just nursing. This was a great way to prepare us to take care of the whole person."

Overall, student responses indicated a positive experience that promoted professional development through communication practices, which foster effective collaboration. Results affirmed the faculty desires to offer an event for both campuses with beneficial outcomes to reinforce student engagement, positive education experience, understanding of EI, and community collaborations. Faculty feedback supported continued collaboration with a different school of nursing, utilizing community resources to meet program outcomes, and promoting professional development for nursing students.

Faculty were excited and anxious to be involved with such a large collaborative event involving two schools of nursing for student professional development focused on EI. The time and effort to plan this type of event proved beneficial. The educational event provided a venue for faculty and students from both schools and the local community to come together for a standardized approach to provide EI education to their students. The baccalaureate program has since expanded the utilization of EI throughout the curriculum for prelicensure students and embedded in individual courses through assignments and simulation.

## Summary

Our findings suggest that multiple-school professional development events provide valuable opportunities for students and faculty and promote awareness of important topics such as EI. This collaborative educational event provided an opportunity to impact nursing students' exposure to EI, which the participating students will take with them into their professional practice.

The event topic of EI curriculum is now embedded in both nursing programs to support student integration and help build on this foundation for effective communication. Future events have been planned for both schools to cultivate educational environments for critical thinking and group collaboration in future practice. These efforts will ultimately influence learning outcomes and directly impact the principles of undergraduate learning for these institutions.

## Future Impact on Nursing

Providing educational experiences for student nurses that promote a collaborative environment stimulates a deeper understanding of the diverse roles within health care. These types of collaborative efforts working toward shared goals have become an essential driver of community health promotion and empowerment.

As our health care system continues to transform and become increasingly complex, the nursing profession requires educators to

search for innovative ways to instill professional values within nursing education programs. EI has been recognized as an effective tool to promote leadership and communication skills. The skills noted with EI are comparable and align with therapeutic relationship skills, which form the basis of our nursing practice. Incorporating EI into nursing education will promote improved decision-making skills that are essential in nursing performance and quality patient outcomes.

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