



Preliminary evidence of efficacy of the Ethics of Human Relations approach on teachers' emotional competence

Enrica Ciucci , Carolina Facci & Andrea Baroncelli

To cite this article: Enrica Ciucci , Carolina Facci & Andrea Baroncelli (2020): Preliminary evidence of efficacy of the Ethics of Human Relations approach on teachers' emotional competence, Journal of Education for Teaching, DOI: [10.1080/02607476.2020.1770581](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1770581)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1770581>



Published online: 22 May 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Preliminary evidence of efficacy of the Ethics of Human Relations approach on teachers' emotional competence

Enrica Ciucci, Carolina Facci and Andrea Baroncelli

Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures, and Psychology, University of Florence, Florence, Italy

ABSTRACT

As part of the flourishing line of research into teachers' emotions, we report the preliminary evidences of efficacy of a pilot Italian intervention program conducted following the Ethics of Human Relations (ERH) approach. The theoretical background of the ERH approach is the attempt to integrate the construct of False and True Self with cognitive neurosciences. The goal of its methodology is to train to a practice that helps the self-generation of internal states of consciousness which is the basis of happiness and universal human values. The study was conducted with the participation of 49 teachers (mean age of 51.94 years, SD 9.87). The training group (N = 29) was exposed to ERH program; the control group (N = 20) did not take part in the program. Teachers from both groups were individually tested pre- and post-training on measures of Authenticity and Regulatory Emotional Self-Efficacy. The training was found to have a significant effect on the Authentic living and Perceived-self-efficacy in expressing positive affect: they decreased in the control group whilst they remained stable in the training group. The need to further assess the ERH method is stressed.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 December 2019

Accepted 24 April 2020

KEYWORDS

Ethics of human relations approach; authenticity; regulatory emotional self-efficacy; teacher education; programme evaluation

Introduction

While the majority of interventions to improve teachers' emotional competence have been implemented and evaluated in the US, a limited number were developed in Europe and their effects mainly consisted of feedback questionnaires or in students' or school-level outcomes (e.g., Madalinska-Michalak 2015). The current study aimed to explore the preliminary evidences of the efficacy of a pilot Italian intervention programme conducted following the Ethics of Human Relations approach (i.e., Franca 2002, 2014), using measures of teachers' individual psychological processes.

The theoretical background of the ERH approach is the attempt to integrate the construct of False and True Self (Winnicott 1960) with cognitive neurosciences (Davidson and Begley 2012). The False Self is highly sensitive to environmental pressures and implements behavioural strategies to avoid frustration and satisfy rewarding environmental responses that, in turn, activate the reward mechanisms for the release of dopamine and serotonin. To the contrary, the True Self is independent of external influences and guides the human behaviour through the expression of universal human

emotions and values (e.g., love, humility, faith, and inner serenity), that activate the pleasure centre by the development of connections in the brain between the prefrontal cortex and the ventral portion of the striatum (Franca 2002, 2014). As a consequence, only behaviours guided by the True Self lead to self-generated and authentic internal states of happiness, compassion, empathy, and allow a person to maintain an internal stability in the face of the variability of external influences. The ERH approach hypothesises that the transition from the False Self to the True Self occurs by creating inhibitory bridges between the prefrontal area and the limbic system, so that the individual no longer seeks gratification from the external environment but from the activation of internal states of consciousness.

The study

The ERH programme was a 20-hour course realised in seven different group meetings (about 30 participants) during November 2016. Each training session was presented by two psychologists. Each session included a theoretical explanation and practice on the ERH technique; teachers were stimulated to apply the ERH technique on their own, during their normal work activities.

Research design

Participants were 49 teachers (44 females, mean of teaching experience = 24.12 years, SD = 11.91 years) from primary and middle schools in central Italy. Twenty-nine teachers participated in the ERH programme, while 20 teachers constituted the control group. This study drew on pre-test (October 2016) and post-test (December 2016) self-report questionnaires. The questionnaires included measures of dispositional authenticity (Di Fabio 2014) and of regulatory emotional self-efficacy (Caprara and Gerbino 2001). Participation was voluntary without incentives. Written informed consent was required. To investigate the effect of the ERH programme, multivariate analyses of variance (i.e., Time x Group) were performed.

Findings

Even if at a conservative level of significance ($p < .10$), an interaction term between Time and Group (Pillais' trace = .062, $F(1,46) = 3.024$, $p = .089$) emerged considering the dimension of living authentically in accordance with True Self. Specifically, there was a significant decrease for the control group (Pillais' trace = .280, $F(1,18) = 7.006$, $p = .016$; M-pre = 5.57, SD = 1.15; M-post = 4.76, SD = 1.27) and a lack of variation for the training group (Pillais' trace = .067, $F(1,28) = 2.008$, $p = .167$; M-pre = 5.78, SD = .80; M-post = 5.54, SD = .74). Moreover, a significant interaction term between Time and Group (Pillais' trace = .117, $F(1,46) = 6.104$, $p = .017$) emerged considering the dimension of regulatory emotional self-efficacy related to positive emotions. Specifically, there was a significant decrease for the control group (Pillais' trace = .280, $F(1,18) = 7.011$, $p = .046$; M-pre = 4.27, SD = .61; M-post = 3.74, SD = .80) and a lack of variation for the training group (Pillais' trace = .015, $F(1,28) = .413$, $p = .526$; M-pre = 4.03, SD = .66; M-post = 3.98, SD = .56).

Discussion and conclusion

The current study presents preliminary evidence for the efficacy of a pilot Italian intervention programme that used the ERH approach. Our results did not show an increase in the average scores of the study variables for the training group; however, the intervention was able to support some components of authenticity (i.e., authentic living) and emotional regulation (i.e., positive emotions) in the participating teachers in a specific period (i.e., the end of the first part of the school year), which is particularly stressful for teachers due to numerous cognitive and relational duties. Of particular importance is that both components refer to a conscious awareness of inner affective states in accordance with one's values and beliefs that are the core of the ERH method. Despite the limitations of the current study (e.g., low sample size and consequent low statistical power), the results seem promising for continuing testing the application of the ERH approach with teachers.

Disclosure statement

FIVE Onlus is the owner of ERH method. The current paper was realized by Authors independently from FIVE Onlus: the funding organization had no influence on the conduct of the study design, data collection, management, analyses or interpretation of the data.

Funding

This work was supported by the Fondazione Internazionale Verso l'Etica (FIVE) Onlus [<https://www.fiveonlus.eu/>].

References

- Caprara, G. V., and M. Gerbino. 2001. "Affective Perceived Self-efficacy: The Capacity to Regulate Negative Affect and to Express Positive Affect." In *Self-efficacy Assessment*, edited by G. V. Caprara, 35–50. Trento: Edizioni Erickson.
- Davidson, R. J., and S. Begley. 2012. *The Emotional Life of Your Brain: How Its Unique Patterns Affect the Way You Think, Feel, and Live - and How You Can Change Them*. New York: Hudson Street Press.
- Di Fabio, A. 2014. "Authenticity Scale: A First Contribution to Validation of the Italian Version." *Counseling* 7: 231–238.
- Franca, G. M. 2002. *La dimensione della coscienza*. Torino: M.I.R. Edizioni.
- Franca, G. M. 2014. *Oltre i confini del pensiero. Fondamenti di Etica delle Relazioni Umane*. Roma: Edizioni Universitarie Romane.
- Madalinska-Michalak, J. 2015. "Developing Emotional Competence for Teaching." *Croatian Journal of Education* 17: 71–97. doi:10.15516/cje.v17i0.1581.
- Winnicott, D. W. 1960. "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self." In *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*, edited by D. W. Winnicott, 140–152. London: Karnac Books.