

Chapter 7

Effects of Military Environment on Students' Emotional Intelligence Development: An Exploratory Analysis

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ABSTRACT

There are 65 military schools in the United States with many sharing the same goals and objectives, which are to develop and prepare students for leadership roles and for post-secondary academic success. Other than anecdotal claims by their alumni, these schools lack the evidence of how this is achieved. This study aims at providing such evidence by assessing the effects of a school's military environment on the students' development of emotional intelligence (IE) as measured by the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short-Form. EI has been associated with academic success and higher leadership effectiveness. This exploratory analysis finds a positive correlation between leadership education level and students' EI scores ($r = .28, < .05$), and a regression analysis ($F(1, 51) = 4.20, p < .05$) predicts and EI score increase of 17% for each year of exposure to the school's military environment. This study suggests that the school's military environment inherently fosters social emotional learning, which in turn positively influences the development of the students' EI.

INTRODUCTION

Many people today mistake a private military preparatory school with a “boot camp.” This mistaken association often occurs because military preparatory school and boot camps both use a military model to modify attendees' behaviors to achieve their goal. The close association between these two environments may lead many to believe that they are the same thing, especially by those who know little much about private military schools. Unfortunately, this association leads to a less than desirable reputation for the military high schools, which are seen as “expensive reform boarding schools that straddle the

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line between juvenile detention centers and adult prisons” (Trousdale, 2007). While some school officials may be aware or suspect that such distorted views of military schools exist, not all of them overtly express their response. Trousdale (2007) quotes an Association of Military Colleges and Schools of the United States (AMCSUS) officer stating the following at an AMCSUS meeting, “Let’s face it. No one spends \$20,000 to send a perfect boy to a military school. They all arrive with baggage.” Trousdale goes on to point out “This general sense of military school is so vague and uninformed that most people believe it is not parents, but some higher judicial authority that places boys there.” This lack of concrete information of how these schools can positively influence the behavior and development of the young men who attend them is the problem.

This chapter explores the development of students’ emotional intelligence at a private military preparatory boarding school. According to militaryschoolusa.com, there are 65 military schools in the United States, and out of these 65 schools, 37 are members of the Association of Military Colleges & Schools of the United States. Many of these schools share the same goals and/or objectives, which are to develop and prepare students for leadership roles and for post-secondary academic success. Other than the anecdotal narratives of success stories presented by their alumni, these schools often fail to present concrete empirical evidence to support such claims. So, how do these schools achieve their stated goals? It has been proposed that higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with higher leadership effectiveness, and that an emotional intelligence variance was not explained by either personality or IQ (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005). This means that personality traits and the individual’s intelligence quotient score does not account for the variance observed on the levels of leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, other researchers have found that academic success was strongly associated with several dimensions of emotional intelligence (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004). What these researchers noted was that emotional intelligence is a common contributor to higher levels of leadership effectiveness and academic achievement. This study briefly explored how a private boarding school’s military environment may facilitate social emotional learning (SEL), which, in turn, may influence the development of students’ emotional intelligence. The exploratory study conducted at this school predicts that for each year a student is exposed to the school’s military environment, the student’s emotional intelligence score, as measured by Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Petrides, 2009), on average may increase by approximately 17%.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence, according to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) is defined as,

...a type of intelligence that involves the ability to process emotional information and use it in reasoning and other cognitive activities, ...it comprises four abilities: to perceive and appraise emotions accurately; to access and evoke emotions when they facilitate cognition; to comprehend emotional language and make use of emotional information; and to regulate one’s own and others’ emotions to promote growth and well-being.

Some studies (Basu & Mermillod, 2011; Parker et al., 2004; Sanchez-Ruiz, Mavroveli, & Poullis, 2013) suggest that emotional intelligence may be more important, in some instances, than cognitive intelligence, as it relates to academic performance; others provide evidence of having a stronger effect

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