

CONTRIBUTIONS OF EARLY EDUCATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF PRESCHOOLERS

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Abstract. *This article aims to highlight the importance of developing emotional intelligence in preschoolers. Issues addressed in the concept of emotional intelligence include: expressing emotions, understanding emotions, managing emotions and their importance in the child's development. We also emphasize the role of attachment in the relationship between child and caregiver, as an essential element of education and emotionally healthy development. The paper also indicates that caregivers influence children's emotional development, representing for them a model, a "coach", of preschoolers' responses and behaviors. For educators, it is presented how they can perceive and process in a social context, the affective manifestations, the negotiation skills and the expectations of the children, with whom they interact in kindergarten. Thus, the first aspect of this paper refers to previous studies in the literature on the development of emotional intelligence, such as expressing emotions, understanding and managing them, the second aspect presents the role and implications of the child-educator relationship in the emotional development of preschoolers. suggests strategies to promote emotional development in preschoolers. The conclusions point out that it is important that during early education, teachers identify children at risk of emotional development retardation and learn to properly recognize and manage the problems of these preschoolers in the stages of developing emotional skills.*

Keywords: *early education; emotional intelligence; attachment relationships; the child-educator relationship; emotional development strategies.*

1. Introduction

There are numerous theoretical and empirical works, which emphasize the role of a malfunction of the caregiver-child relationship in the further development of socio-emotional difficulties of the child (Robinson, Emde, Korfmacher, 1997). For emotional development, it is necessary to have relationships with caregivers, but also with colleagues of the same age, because they provide different experiences and serve separate functions. The relationship between the caregiver and the child offers the latter comfort, safety and protection in the first years of life, but also the basic social skills that are so necessary for a harmonious development (Hartup, 1989), (Sroufe, 1997).

Relationships with colleagues, on the other hand, are contexts in which children practice their acquired skills in the relationship with the caregiver, with people who are more or less similar to him and become small masters in the complexities of cooperation and competition (Hartup, 1989). In essence, the relationship between the caregiver and the child is a training ground for emotional skills, which are then transferred to the relationship of preschoolers with other children.

The two types of relationship are closely related to social development, because emotions are expressed not only in a social context, but also in the matrix of care and dedication relationships (Sroufe, 1997). Through this we find that the child's ability to cope effectively with his social life is largely a result of experiences in relationships with loved ones (Hartup, 1989).

2. Previous studies and research on the importance of developing emotional intelligence in preschoolers

We understand emotion as an organized reaction to an event that is relevant to individual needs, goals, and interests and is characterized by a psychological, experiential, and obviously behavioral change (Robinson, Emde, Korfmacher, 1997; Sroufe, 1997). From this perspective, a child's emotions have two functions: the motivational one and the communication one. As a motivational factor, emotions determine the child's behavior. For example, a preschooler approaches a new phenomenon, provided it is not interpreted as a threat; however, avoidance results if the interpretation is associated with a threat. Children use the communicative function of emotions to get others to respond to their needs. These include both words and tears or smiles (Robinson, Emde, Korfmacher, 1997).

Although the child has a particular set of skills related to his emotional life, the other people in his life play a role in developing his emotional skills. These have to do with the innate differences and the first care that created the early adaptation of the child (Vaughn, Stevenson-Hinde, Waters, Kotsaftis, Lefever, Trudel, Shouldice, Belsky, 1992).

2.1. Emotional expression

The ability of children to express emotions effectively is a point of reference for social interactions. A child's social competence is assessed according to the type, frequency and duration of emotional expression. If a child expresses constantly and for a long time

nervousness, this suggests that the social partners will be discouraged from continuing to interact with him. The reason is that experience and emotional expression affect the child's behavior, which in turn provides information to potential social partners about the continuation or cessation of interactions with him (Denham, 1998).

In most cases, children are sensitive to others, are aware of the perspective of others and show altruistic attitudes (Mussen, Eisenberg, 1997). At the age of two, provided an emotional security and a relative experience of emotions, (Strayer, 1980) children are able to interpret, for the most part, the emotional states of others, to experience these emotional states as an empathic response (especially in case of negative emotions) and try to alleviate the emotional discomfort of others (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller, Shell, Plumlee, 1990).

At the age of 3, the context and identities of the social partners become determinants of the type of emotion expressed. Children have the ability to alternate mode and expressiveness according to situational requirements (Malatesta, Culver, Tesman, Shepard, 1989). Children also learn to adopt rules of behavior (eg, expressing emotions appropriately culturally), to substitute, mask, minimize, or maximize their emotional expressiveness in accordance with certain situations and for the purpose of self-preservation.

Three-, four- and five-year-olds express a wide range of emotions and can use appropriate labels for those such as upset, sadness, happiness, so that they can differentiate their feelings. During the kindergarten years, children's emotional states are situation-specific and can change as quickly as they move from one activity to another. As they grow from three to five years old, they experience an increasing internalization and a better ability to regulate their own emotions. Thus, as they develop, they accumulate new language and cognitive skills and learn to manage their emotions and express how others feel and feel.

The emotions of three- and four-year-olds are largely externalized. At this age, children begin to understand the different emotions they feel, but are struggling when it comes to adjusting them or identifying and describing them. Their emotions are closely related to the events and feelings that occur at that time (Hyson, 1994).

Also, three- and four-year-olds have difficulty separating feelings from actions. The moment they feel something, they express themselves. Postponement of gratification and controlling impulsive feelings is often a real challenge. Therefore, their natural curiosity often brings them problems. At the age of four, children often use physical means to resolve conflicts, instead of verbally negotiating needs. Teaching preschoolers the right means to express personal emotions is a "milestone" in their evolution. Conflicts that occur between two children out of a desire to take an object are common, so it is important to be taught in different socially acceptable ways to resolve the conflict (Brownell, Hazen, 1999).

At the age of three, children experience extreme emotions. When they are upset, they express their emotions through personality crises or physical manifestations. The same goes for the moments when they are happy. At the slightest stimulus, they express themselves through uncontrolled laughter and / or giggles of joy, and once they begin, they are hard to stop. At the age of four, they understand that expressing extreme emotions can have an effect on others. Right now they are developing a sense of humor, and sometimes they will laugh just to make others laugh. Children begin to understand the nature of a joke, the fact that sometimes people say certain things in order to be funny. Preschoolers can say the same old-fashioned riddle or the same joke a thousand times and laugh heartily every time. At the age of three, children begin to have fears that they can identify. They want to sleep with the light on or they will never go to a dark cellar alone. They continue to be present at the age of four, but they begin to understand that the dream is different from reality and can distinguish between what they did and what they only dreamed they did.

Four-year-old preschoolers begin to understand that others have feelings (Denham, 1998) and how others feel. Separation from parents or caregivers can sometimes be difficult, especially in kindergarten, and can cause emotional stress (Denham, 1998). At the age of three, children are less interested in playing with other children and are much more excited to spend time with their caregiver. For four-year-olds, the fear of alienation is generally short-lived and harder for parents to digest than for the child.

Five-year-olds begin to manage their emotions and express their feelings in socially acceptable ways. At this age, children begin to separate their feelings from actions (Denham, 1998).

Five-year-olds manage to postpone their wishes. They learn to wait their turn for a toy or listen when someone talks and begin to internalize socially accepted behaviors, and when they see something they want, they ask (Greenspan,1989). If they are told that they are not allowed to receive anything, whether we are talking about disappointment or anger, they learn to deal with these feelings. Although at this age, curiosity is very strong, they begin to understand the limits of curiosity. Instead of simply taking his colleague's train, they ask if they can see him.

Physical aggression and temper tantrums begin to disappear. As children can express their feelings in words, the behavioral expression of emotions begins to dwindle. At this age, they often use associations with unpleasant things to name a thing or colleague they don't like, with the first forms of bullying appearing. At the same time, children learn to differentiate between different types of emotions, being able to identify facial expressions that show that someone is happy, nervous, sad or just disappointed.

Five-year-olds are very funny, loving and affectionate. They like to laugh, to make others laugh, they discover jokes, but they still don't understand the logic needed to make their own funny jokes. Crying becomes a specific situation. At this age, children can control their tears resulting from physical pain or frustration and if they have been injured by a colleague. Such incidents tend to be increasingly rare.

In the early days of kindergarten, some children may break up with mothers with tears in their eyes, tears due to fear of the unknown. But these tears do not last long. It is rare for a five-year-old child to cry for more than a month from the beginning of kindergarten.

2.2. Understanding emotions

It is important for preschoolers to understand the emotions of playmates, because it gives them the ability to perceive the communicative function of the emotions they or another person feels. Understanding emotions serves as a function of survival. Subjectivity and meaning are important elements in understanding emotions, because they explain why a particular emotion is triggered in similar situations and at the same time explain the differences in emotional expressiveness (Sroufe, 1997). Understanding causal factors in emotional situations improves in the preschool period. Children begin to use information in their daily lives, to understand the underlying emotions — fear, anger, sadness, and happiness — and why they occur (Dunn, Hughes, 1998). They can also talk about their feelings because they understand the causal complexities of emotions. Through their own experiences and increased social sensitivity, children develop the ability to evaluate the

emotions of others, even when they are less obvious, to recognize different emotional experiences, to manage their own emotions, to experience several emotions simultaneously (Denham, 1998).).

Children need to experience, on a moderate level, a variety of emotions in order to build social patterns about emotions. First, they reflect and make judgments about their own emotions. It is important to allow children to experience emotions by encouraging positive ones and helping them learn to manage negative ones in socially acceptable ways (Denham, 1998).

2.3. Emotion management

An important part of emotional skills is managing emotions. Both negative and positive emotions can overwhelm the child's resources, and when this happens, the child's behavior and / or thoughts may become disorganized. When this happens, the caregiver usually reassures him. Another common manifestation of children overwhelmed by emotions is a passive, withdrawn attitude. In such situations, caregivers try to encourage or stimulate the child through play (Robinson, Emde, Korfmacher, 1997).

Children's ability to manage the "emotional turmoil" that accompanies social interactions is fundamental to growth and the ability to interact and relate to others (Thompson, 1990). The way children express their feelings is related to the assessment of their social skills by people in their social life. Thus, in the learning process, in order to get along with colleagues of the same age, the child is forced to regulate his emotional expressiveness (Denham, 1998). In the beginning, caregivers are the ones who have almost all the responsibility of keeping emotional expressions at a tolerable level. Over time, the child begins to play an active role in the adjustment process, responding to caregivers and finally, asking for help in management through deliberate efforts, such as crying or seeking comfort in the arms of the latter. The caregiver is the one who "trains" the child in the management of internal tensions (Denham, 1998, Sroufe, 1997).

3. The role and implications of the child-educator relationship in the emotional development of the preschooler

The problem explored in this chapter is how the relationship between caregiver and child affects the child's emotional development and need to form social and emotional relationships with others (Caldwell, Ricciuti, 1973; Bowlby, 1969). The quality of the relationship between the two has been conceptualized in terms of the attachment relationship that offers the following hypotheses:

- a. Different levels of quality of care lead to differences in children's expectations regarding the caregiver's dependence and responsibilities;
- b. These differences in expectations have a large subsequent impact on emotional expression, understanding of emotions and later on managing emotions (Sroufe, 1997).

The quality of the child-educator relationship also influences children's strategies and behavioral patterns in their interaction with caregivers. The child who has a relationship that gives him the feeling of security with his caregiver, initiates a positive interaction with the latter, moreover, he responds positively to his initiatives. On the other hand, the child who has a relationship with his caregiver, which is not based on safety, leads to various strategies from ignoring the caregiver's behavior and intentions, accentuating the expression of negative emotions - to ensure that the caregiver remains closed, and up to hostile actions directed at the caregiver (Fox (Ed.), 1994).

The educator-child relationship influences emotional development and the need to form emotional and social relationships with others (Caldwell, & Ricciuti, 1973), (Bowlby, 1969), depending on the model taken by caregivers, their educational capacity and the way whether or not to respond to stress signals and children's needs (Feldman & Rime, 1991). These processes also influence children's emotional development through distortions in emotional expression and emotion management (Sroufe, 1997).

3.1. Modeling and emotional development in the context of the child-caregiver / educator relationship

Children's expressiveness reflects the total expressiveness of caregivers (Cummings, Cummings, 1988). For example, caregivers who often express anger are more likely to have children who also express anger, because by modeling, caregivers give children information about the nature of emotions, their expressions, and how they have to deal with their own emotions. the emotions of others (Thompson, 1990). By exemplifying a wide range of emotions, caregivers implicitly teach children those emotions that are appropriate for specific situations, but also common behaviors related to these expressions. This example of adults also provides an emotional environment to which the child is exposed (Denham, 1998).

3.2. Emotional training and development in the context of the child-caregiver/educator relationship

Educators encourage children's exploration and direct understanding through verbal communication with them of the experiential meaning of emotions

(Thompson, 1990). Caregivers who talk about emotions and stimulate this ability in children, help them to express ideal patterns of emotion and separate the impulse of behavior (Denham, 1998).

3.3.Contingent response and emotional development in the context of the child-caregiver/ educator relationship

Caregivers' emotional and behavioral reactions to children's emotions help them to differentiate between emotions. These reactions can be important ways to teach children that there are behaviors appropriate to different moods and which events may or may not deserve emotional expression (Denham, 1998). Caregivers also use direct commands and emotion instructions in their speech about emotions, such as language guidance and socialization. Moreover, educators contribute, by managing the information given to the child, to the potential emotional events in his life (Denham, 1998). Caregivers can also be generous or punitive in their responses to children's emotions. When caregivers assist the child in maintaining positive affect as a valid and worthwhile issue, it promotes integrated, emotionally balanced emotional development. This helps children cope with strong emotions (Denham, 1998). On the other hand, caregivers who are punitive and ignore or deny the child's emotional expression fail to take advantage of emotional moments as a chance to approach the child or help him or her learn lessons about emotional competence (Goleman, 2005).

Therefore, the question of the significance of children's emotional development for educators arises. The answers are primarily about helping educators understand that preschoolers are emotionally sophisticated, for example, that preschoolers can be empathetic and caring for others. It also means that educators can identify those children who do not have the necessary skills for a positive social interaction with colleagues, as well as their inability to express and regulate their emotions in their interactions with colleagues. Last but not least, that educators can and should talk to children about their emotional problems.

Understanding the educator-child relationship helps educators understand that the caregiver-child relationship influences the child's emotional perceptions, negotiation skills, emotional regulation, and the transfer of expectations. It also helps teachers to understand that children who have a relationship with their caregivers, who provide them with security and emotional balance, can show both negative and positive feelings in all situations. On the other hand, the emotional manifestations of children who do not have a safe relationship with their caregivers, tend to be compromised because they tend to inhibit their feelings and display a state

that is inconsistent with the feelings they have or may have. Such children tend to exaggerate in the affective manifestation (Crittenden, 1992). What are the expectations created in the relationship between the child and the caregiver which are transferred to other relationships? This question emphasizes the influence that the child's expectations have on others, which determines the child to approach social partners, having relational prejudices.

All other relationships in which the child is involved are approached with a negative expectation, as if the child is seeking confirmation of these expectations. If the social partners behave in a consistent manner with the child's negative expectations, then it is likely that the child will behave in a manner, that will be interpreted as that of a socially incompetent person. On the other hand, if the social partners do not feed the child's negative expectations, then the child's expectations are provoked by a different source of information, and this could result in an attempt to change the child by trying to assimilate into his perceptual world, new information about the relationship with others. This information, once assimilated, lays the groundwork for a new relationship notion with that person. It is as if the child records memories of different relationships and plays different roles depending on the social situation.

For teachers, this means that they must be available and receptive to the needs of all children in the class. When they respond constantly, then they help children develop alternative worldviews and relationships. Being at the same time empathetic, they teach children that emotional experiences should not be overwhelming, but rather, they can be controlled. Over time, children will be able to adjust their emotions with little or no help.

4. Strategies to promote emotional development in preschoolers

Apart from the primary caregiver (parent or parents) and other people can have an influence on the emotional development of the child. The teacher can develop a positive relationship with a child and thus support the development of the preschooler's emotional skills. During the interactions with the children, the teachers must be open to the transactions that take place, because as there are changes in the children's development, there will be changes in their relationship with the children. However, the affective basis of these relationships continues to involve the desire for closeness in times of stress, on the one hand, and feelings of trust, on the other. (Hartup, 1989).

We present here some strategies, which educators can use to promote emotional development: (a) the stage of gratitude, (b) the stage of feelings,

(c) affective activities, (d) emotional management techniques, and (e) solving social problems.

The stage of gratitude. Teachers can set a time period, other than the group time, to help children express their feelings. This allows children to show their gratitude or appreciation for those they perceive to be very kind to them. It also encourages the building of relationships in which children express their affection in relation to others.

Exploring feelings. This stage includes inoculating ideas about primary emotions. The goal is to let the children talk as much as possible about the causes of their emotions, what they do when they experience these emotions, what they can do to make these emotions go away, and what they think another child might do in the same situation. By labeling their feelings, they begin to understand how others feel and how each emotional stage influences their thinking. When children make the connections between emotions and reason, they will understand that the way they feel will largely determine what they do.

Exploring affective activities. A teacher can do many activities so that the children show their affection for each other. An educator can invite the children to sit down and choose a numbered card. The number on it represents the number of children with whom he must shake hands or hug or give them a kiss on the cheek. The goal is to teach children how to learn to be friends and express their emotions correctly (Twardosz, Nordquist, Simon and Botkin, 1983).

Emotional management techniques. The purpose of this strategy is to teach children the skills of self-regulation and monitoring of negative emotions when they feel overwhelmed by them by creating a quiet space in a corner of the room (Denham, 1998). This can be a corner where children can go to calm down when they experience strong emotions. What the educator needs to remember is that he should try to calm the child down. The goal is for this corner not to be used as a place of punishment or timeout, because the actions of the educator are very important at this stage.

Addressing the solution of social problems. This method aims to help children analyze and solve effective interpersonal problems. It also involves an empathic component, through which children come to realize the effects that their actions have on others. Conflict means that children must learn to communicate, negotiate, compromise, and interact (Camras, 1980). Two approaches can be used. The first involves the use of dolls and role-playing games to teach children how to solve interpersonal problems without resorting to aggression. The second approach is to allow children to try to resolve conflicts on their own when a misunderstanding occurs. Whichever

of these approaches is used, the goal is to get the children to come to the educator to tell them how they resolved the conflict, so that he or she can use this opportunity to give the children feedback and promote positive interaction between colleagues (Killen, Turiel, 1991).

5. Conclusions

Because of the verbal limitations of preschoolers, emotions are important social signals that preschoolers express in their relationships. Educators need to recognize the importance of emotional skills for a competent social attitude in young children and find ways to cultivate it. It is also important that during early education, teachers identify children at risk of delayed emotional development and learn to recognize and properly manage the problems of these preschoolers, in the stages of developing emotional skills.

Children's emotional development has long-term implications for adaptation to preschool and school. Discontinuities and blockages in early emotional development are often predictors of behavioral problems manifested in the first and second part of childhood (Cicchetti, Ganiban, Barnett, 1991). Children who understand emotions and how these emotions are expressed, are able to empathize with other children who may be in difficulty. They are also able to express in words what they feel.

Children who are emotionally competent are considered by their peers to be better and more fun playmates. They can strategically use expressiveness to achieve their social goals and are advantaged when they respond correctly to the emotions of others while playing and at the same time can be more pleasant (Walden, Field, 1990).

The important conclusion is that educators contribute to children's emotional development by correctly identifying clues and their sensitive response. Educators' consistent and correct responses teach children how to regulate their emotions (Robinson, Emde, Korfmacher, 1997) and contribute to competent emotional behaviors throughout life.

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