

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE TEACHING CAREER OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract: *One of the greatest challenges of the 21st century school is to rethinking teacher training according to new social digital trends. A lot of study underlines that teacher's competences hierarchy has been changed: new competences as digital competences, pedagogical creativity or socio-emotional competences are a priority. Teachers must be aware of this major change and accept that the students of the 21st century have different ways of thinking, different activities and interests. The purpose of this research was to identify the factors of emotional intelligence, which are involved in the teaching profession and shape the student's learning and behavior. The present study was conducted in a mixt methods structure, which employed both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, embedded in a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. One of the main conclusions of the research is that emotional intelligence and social skills are important tools for adaptation to learning and development for the student's needs. A study has shown that a teacher with a high level of emotional intelligence, above average, positively influences the relationships formed within the class, namely the "student-teacher" and "student-student" relationships. The student-teacher relationship is based on communication, understanding, and friendship, and mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning.*

Key words: *emotional intelligence; social skills; teaching competences.*

1. Introduction

It is a fact that the evolution of technology must be accompanied by moral and emotional development. Students have to learn how to use technology as a useful instrument for human development, to promote a new 21st century ethic based on responsibility, self-agency, while interacting with others and interacting in and with the world.

In 2022, OECD has proposed four scenarios for future education. An important conclusion is that despite of any scenario the teacher profession must be restructured according with to new trends of human and society development.

Hargreaves (2000) proposed that the evolution of teacher professionalism can be categorized into four distinct ages. The most difficult of these is the fourth age, which he refers to as the postmodern or post-professional age. The main characteristic of teaching and teacher professionalism, outside of new technology communications skills, is a new type of relationships with parents (as a consequence of changing family structures, dynamic of workplace), colleagues and community. Teachers have to learn to work within a more diverse community, to see parents as sources of learning and support rather than interference, to communicate more to social workers and second language teachers” (Hargreaves,2000:172).

Regarding the digital age we are in, the entire educational process is constantly changing, teachers must be aware of this major change and accept that the students of the 21st century have different ways of thinking, activities and interests than the students of the past and these is closely related to technology. (Leu et al., 2004)

Swadia, 2018, considers that the adaptation of the educational process to the needs of the students of the 21st century, students also called "digital natives", implies: the digitization of education, the development of a relationship of collaboration and cooperation with students, learning to be active and interactive, to be based on life experiences, the main priority of teachers should be to form life skills.

The teacher`s responsibilities must be redefined according to the social movement. They must be more than educational actors, agents of social changes, promoters of new social ethic, digital citizenship etc. Therefore, teachers need to develop new key competences which help them to face the learning needs of new generation.

1.2. The role of social competences and emotional intelligence in future world

The most important skills, to be successful in life, are the social and emotional ones. (OECD,2015). These skills greatly influence achievement across the board (school/academic results, job performance, professional achievement, mental health, and personal and social well-being). Many times, social skills influence a person's life both directly and indirectly. For example, an adult with developed social skills will be able to successfully negotiate a job interview, a child with developed social skills will be able to adapt more easily to the school environment, will have a group of friends, consequently will have a "state well" at school. This well-being leads to very good school results, performance and balance, which will later bring professional, social fulfillment and success. Curiosity and the ability to have an "open mind" help the individual (regardless of age) to approach learning actively and thus develop and improve their native cognitive capacities.

Richardson (2000) indicates that adults whose social and emotional competence are less developed are at risk of becoming self-centered and unable to empathize and relate to others. According to Goleman (2011), the most worrying findings were made following a longitudinal study carried out in the USA, in which more than over 2,000 children who were evaluated by parents and teachers that having a lower level of emotional intelligence and undeveloped social skills, as adults they became impulsive, angry individuals with isolation and depressed tendencies.

When we talk about contemporary pedagogical mastery, we think of a combination between effective communication and an empathic attitude, and on this basis will be "placed" teaching strategies, relevant content and student involvement. Very often, students have various uncertainties and feel misunderstood, they can encounter all kinds of communication blockages, or difficulties in expressing themselves, and here the teacher's empathy becomes support through speeches and explanations, by bringing one's own person into the student's pose, by offering examples to highlight that there are many people who were in the same situation but got over it, developed beautifully and harmoniously through self-acceptance. (Postolache 2020)

Middle childhood (5-11 years) is often treated as a period in which children develop unidirectionally. But the range from kindergarten to 5th grade includes a series of changes, on several directions and levels: biological, social, cognitive and (very important) emotional changes. Children are exposed to an ever-increasing number of contexts, to an ever-increasing volume of information, and that's why it is expected for them to develop a set

of skills to be able to face multiple challenges. That is why we have a strong argument to emphasize the importance of training these social-emotional skills and competencies during primary school. Children who master these skills and competencies get along better with others, do better in school and have a successful career and a better mental and physical level. (Jones, Bouffard & Weissbourd, 2013)

1.3. The Role of emotional intelligence in teachers work

The link between emotional intelligence and professional success is strong in every profession/work. In teachers' work, emotional intelligence as part of social competences is an important condition for students learning.

The recent research (Hattie 2014, Cozolino2017) underlines the link between teachers' affections or sociability and students' motivation and show that in teaching profession competence social as emotional intelligence, self-control, communication are important for students learning and students well-being.

Moreover, the teacher's social skills are valued differently according to the educational levels. For example, they are very important for pre-school and primary level and become secondary in high school education.

This underlines the fact that for the development of learning skills, students from preschool and primary need a very good emotional relationship with the teacher.

Ivić et al. al., (2001 cited in Snežana Stojiljkovic' et al. 2012) emphasizes the fact that today's teacher must cooperate with parents and partners in the local community. This competence has risen in the hierarchy of teachers' competences along with that of students learning counseling or professional development.

Many studies show the positive influence of the teacher with a developed level of emotional intelligence on the students. Teachers are able to support students, trying to understand the true meaning of their behavior. It has been shown that students who have teacher with a developed level of emotional intelligence in the classroom have fewer problems with learning motivation and are more conscientious and persistent. They can easily understand students' behavior, students achieve better academic results and their social development is harmonious. (Klis M., Kossewska J., 2000).

Analyzing the roles that a teacher has in the classroom, we can see that the emotional dimension is included in all roles, we can even say that it represents the basis. Both social relations and classroom activity are based on this ability

to understand, beyond words, the behavior of the people they interact with (students, parents, etc.). A teacher with a high level of empathy will be able to easily manage the relationships he has with the community as well as with students and their parents, we are talking here about interactions with a great diversity of people who come from different backgrounds, with different principles and values different. Only an emotional intelligent behavior can make a teacher be able to manage all situations, constructively, leaving aside the ego and, at the same time, realizing that it is not about his own person but about his students. So, we can conclude that emotional intelligence is the main dimension, as far as this job is concerned, an increased level of emotional intelligence makes the difference between mediocrity and excellence.

2. Methodology

This study addresses two research questions study: Who shapes the teachers emotional intelligence the didactical behavior and students learning? How does the teacher's emotional intelligence of the teacher influence his own didactic behavior and the behavior of the students?

The goal of this study is to analyse and describe how the teacher's emotional intelligence shape the students' behavior

The present study was conducted in a mixt methods structure, which employed both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection, embedded in a constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm. We are interested in deeply understanding specific cases within a particular context. (Patton, 2002).

2.1. Participants

This study involved research conducted over the course of one school year (September 2022 to June 2023). The study included two female primary school teachers from urban schools in Brasov County, Romania. The two teachers taught classes of 26 and respectively, 28 children.

Were two primary teachers from the same school and their students. These two teachers were observed in their classroom for one year. One of them is 66 years old with over 45 years of experience (S.M.), while the other one is 47 years old with 20 years of experience (R.B.)

2.2. Research Tools

2.2.1. The Multidimensional Emotional Intelligence Assessment

MCSEIT test is a psychological instrument used to evaluate a person's emotional intelligence. This test measures five dimensions of emotional intelligence: recognition of emotions, management of emotions, use of emotions to make decisions, empathy, and social skills. Each dimension is measured by several sub-tests, and the final score provides an evaluation of a person's ability to recognize and manage their own and others' emotions.

2.2.2. Scale for evaluating student behavior

The observation grid is based on the operationalization of the "consequences of empathic behavior" of the teacher towards students, with behaviors specific to students who interact in class with an empathetic teacher. The influence of the teacher's empathic behavior is reflected not only in the "student-teacher" relationship but also in the "student-student" relationships, which is why the grid also targets behaviors within the "student-student" relationship.

2.2.3. Narrative observation grid for student-teacher and student-student relationships

This observation grid is designed to capture the attitudes of students and teachers through indicators (verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal) in two key contexts of a lesson - the teaching context and the evaluation context. These indicators are essential in observing the dynamics of the "student-teacher" and "student-student" relationships.

2.2.4. Scale for evaluating teacher behavior

The observation grid is based on the operationalization of the "empathic behavior" of the teacher. The higher the level of empathy of a teacher, the more often the targeted behaviors are manifested.

We also conducted an interview with parents, consisting of eight open-ended questions, where they are interviewed about their opinions on certain teacher behaviors in class that reveal the teacher's level of emotional intelligence.

3. Results and interpretation

The results obtained for each branch of emotional intelligence.

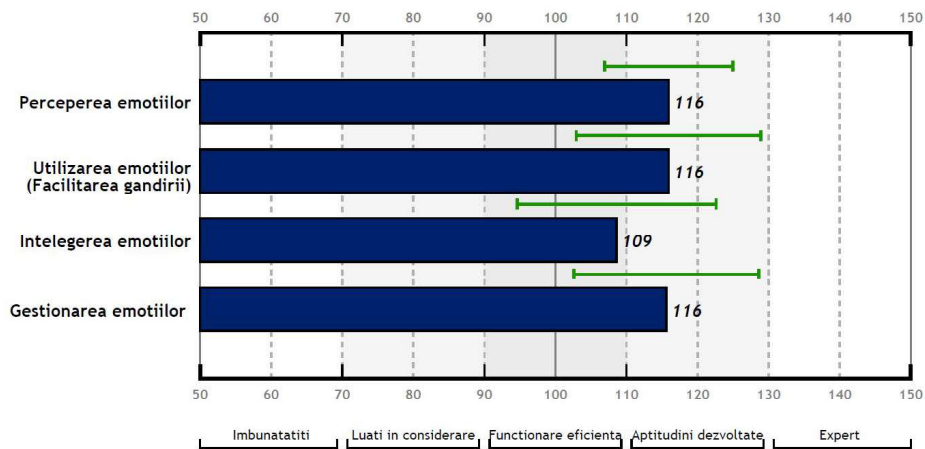


Figure no. 1 - R.B. results for each branch of emotional intelligence

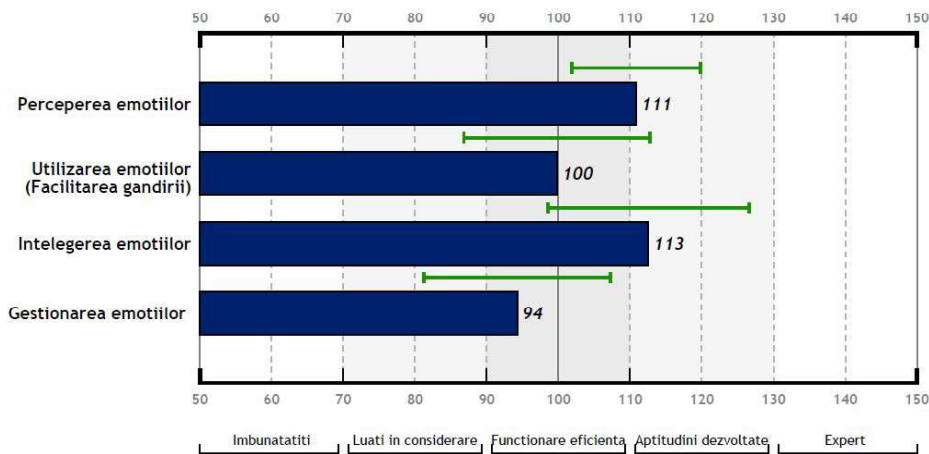


Figure no. 2 - S.M. results for each branch of emotional intelligence

By analyzing the scores obtained by each subject in the different areas, we can observe that subject R.B. is at the "developed skills" level in three of them, specifically Perception of emotions - score 116, Utilization of emotions (facilitating thinking) - score 116, and Management of emotions - score 116. In one area, the subject is at the level of efficient functioning - specifically Understanding emotions - score 109. As for subject S.M., she is at the developed skills level in two of the areas - Perception of emotions - score 111, Understanding emotions - score 113, and at the efficient functioning level in

two of them - Utilization of emotions (facilitating thinking) - score 100, Management of emotions - score 94.

Based on the observation of their behavior and the completion of the narrative observation grid, the following behaviors were identified, correlated with the level of emotional intelligence areas in which each teacher is positioned:

❖ **Emotion perception**

In this area, the two teaching staff obtained the following scores:

S.M. – emotion perception – score 111/ developed aptitudes

R.B. – emotion perception – score 116/ developed aptitudes

Following observations in both classes, during the first part of the lesson, there was a calm atmosphere. In the second part, the children began to become restless, fidgeting and talking to each other. At that moment, the teachers used nonverbal language to calm them down. They raised a hand and the children stopped talking. If the noise continued and the students who were disturbed by the noise also raised a hand, then it was known that more people were bothered and the noise stopped in the end. This behavior denotes a high level of emotion perception capacity from the teachers, but furthermore, through imitation, the children learn how to perceive others' emotions and manage situations constructively and calmly. Additionally, both teachers often have a positive attitude when a student gives a wrong answer, noticing when a student does not understand a task without the student verbally expressing it. The qualitative analysis of the answers to the questionnaires revealed that teachers create positive atmosphere in classroom. To the question "How *would you define the overall "atmosphere" in the classroom?*" Both teachers answered that the classroom atmosphere is playful, friendly, harmonious, and that students are free to express their opinions. The atmosphere is based on solid communication based on mutual respect and empathy, and motivates students to learn. To the question "How does verbal/nonverbal feedback you receive from students during teaching/evaluating a lesson influence you?" both teachers claimed that feedback from students, whether verbal or nonverbal, is very important. It is an important indicator for the entire course of the lesson. Teachers are attentive to the confusion or uncertainty in the children's eyes or attitude, and thus realize that explanations must be rephrased or simplified, or a different approach must be found to reach their minds. Those who are inattentive or bored are asked for their opinion or solutions/ideas to be anchored back into the lesson.

The qualitative analysis of the answers to the questionnaires revealed that parents have a positive attitude. The answers to the question "What *do you*

consider to be the strengths of your child's teacher?" reflect that the teacher is well-prepared, balanced, organized, punctual, shows love and understanding towards the child. The strengths are patience, empathy, involvement, and gentleness with which each child is treated. The teachers show them how empathy works and how each "conflicting party" gains something by being empathic towards each other. They describe the relationship between children and teacher based on respect, collaboration, and admiration. One parent of a student in R.B.'s class claimed that "when the teacher is upset or happy and the child also is...".

We can conclude that both teachers have a high level of emotional perception ability, which has a major influence on the teacher's connection with each student, influences the classroom atmosphere which, as we can see with both teachers, is warm and calm, conducive to learning and generates a sense of well-being for the child. But in addition to these aspects, the high capacity for understanding emotions of the teachers also helps students develop this ability through imitation, which leads to positive and constructive social relationships with classmates.

❖ **The use of emotions to facilitate thinking**

In this area, the two teaching staff obtained the following scores:

R.B. - Use of emotions (facilitating thinking) - score 116/developed skills

S.M. - Use of emotions (facilitating thinking) - score 100 / efficient functioning

This ability refers to the use of feelings and emotions to improve the thinking process and assist in decision-making. For example, when we are motivated and confident, we are more likely to find creative solutions to our problems. At the same time, when we are stressed or anxious, we may feel blocked and have difficulty making important decisions. Therefore, it is important to be aware of our emotions and manage them effectively to help us think more clearly and make better decisions.

Following the observation of behavior and completion of the narrative observation grid, the following behaviors were identified as indicating a high level of use of emotions in facilitating thinking: regarding feedback, it was given both verbally, through phrases such as "try again", "well done", "very good", "I think you can do even better", "try and you will see that you can" etc., feedback was mostly given individually, after each answer or task. Verbal feedback was accompanied by paraverbal language, with a calm, warm tone and low voice. Nonverbal feedback was given through "broad smiles", "facial expressions", "widened eyes", "hugs", and "applause". They always have a

positive attitude when a student gives a wrong answer, showing tolerance, smiling, and relating without discrimination. Regarding this profession, I believe that this ability is reflected more in the ability to be aware of the influence of positive emotions in facilitating the learning process in children, especially young children who do not have a well-developed emotional self-regulation. Therefore, we can observe that both teachers have an encouraging attitude regarding the feedback they give, which is constructive, even if there are things to be corrected. Their attitude creates a sense of well-being regardless of the results they achieve, supports the progress of children, and helps them stay motivated in the learning process.

The difference in score between the two teachers may be due to the difference in motivation generated by each one's professional stage, but we believe that in this area, there is also an aspect related to the kinesthetic ability of each teacher. R.B. is a more kinesthetic person, as evidenced by the tendency to embrace students when giving feedback and always touching them on the shoulder, head, etc. during the lesson. The theory states that kinesthetic individuals tend to have a higher level of empathy, and empathy is a basic component of emotional intelligence that increases awareness regarding the use of emotions in facilitating thinking.

❖ **Emotion management**

In this area, the two-teaching staff obtained the following scores:

R.B. - Emotion management - score 116 / developed aptitude

M.S. - Emotion management - score 94 / efficient functioning

Emotional management refers to the ability to recognize, understand and manage one's own emotions and emotional reactions in a constructive and efficient manner. It also includes the ability to communicate and relate to others in a healthy and positive way, even in stressful or challenging situations. This dimension of emotional intelligence is best reflected in the relationships that teachers have with their students, as well as in the relationships that students have with each other. At this young age, children learn a lot through imitation, so with positive behavioral models and good guidance, they will know how to manage their own emotions and have healthy relationships as future adults.

Based on observations of the behavior of students and teachers and the two interviews conducted, it can be said that the "student-teacher" and "student-student" relationships are positively influenced by the teacher's emotional management skills. Data analysis revealed that the "student-teacher"

relationship is a bilateral one, in which students have the courage to freely express their point of view, view mistakes as learning opportunities, and communicate verbally, non-verbally, and para-verbally. Students feel safe, and their relationship with the teacher provides them with emotional comfort. The relationship is based on communication, understanding, friendship, support, and unconditional acceptance. They are motivated to learn and at the same time have confidence in their own abilities, and their self-esteem increases, leading to the development of student autonomy. Increased self-esteem and self-confidence help the student develop the ability to adapt to different situations, which is "vital" as a future adult in a constantly changing society. A positive and constructive "student-teacher" relationship ensures students' harmonious development from all points of view (psycho-social, cognitive, emotional), making the school a reliable partner in the "school-community" relationship.

From the observations made, the following are the behaviors that teachers frequently manifest and demonstrate the above-mentioned qualities:

- They have a positive attitude when a student gives a wrong answer.
- They notice when a student does not understand a task without the student having to express this verbally.
- They relate to students without discrimination.
- They always smile.
- They use phrases like "please" and "thank you."
- They encourage students using phrases like "well done," "great job," "you did it," "I think you can do even better," "try it and you'll see that you can."

The following are the behaviors that students frequently manifest and demonstrate the above-mentioned qualities:

- They participate with interest and pleasure in activities.
- They show interest in correcting their own mistakes.
- They have the courage to ask for help when they do not understand a task.
- They show motivation in everything they do.
- They take responsibility for solving tasks on their own.

Additionally, literature supports the above-mentioned aspects, Connell (1993 cited in Swan, Riley, 2012) highlights the relational aspect of the teaching process. The teacher's activity in the classroom is guided by emotional aspects of the "teacher-student" relationship, such as sympathy, interest, surprise, boredom, humor, anger, frustration, trust, determination, and

motivation. If there is a relationship based on harmony, calmness, communication, and attitude, then the outcome will be accordingly. Moreover, he supports that teaching in school is one of the most emotionally demanding jobs, realizing the major importance it has in the instructive-educational process, this affective bridge created by the teacher through the type of relationship they have with the student (positive-negative).

The qualitative analysis of the answers to the questionnaires revealed that the teachers create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom children are free to express their opinions while following basic rules regarding behavior and communication based on empathy, respect, and tolerance. The relationship with students is based on respect, honesty, and trust. They are always open to their suggestions/proposals if they are well-reasoned. They like to see them happy, coming to school without fear. The qualitative analysis of the answers to the questionnaires revealed that parents have a positive attitude. They believe that the relationship between teacher and students is based on mutual respect and trust. The children are very close to the teacher, trust her, and relate very well, being very open when she talks to them. The children are very excited about school, colleagues, and the teacher.

❖ **Understanding emotions**

In this area, the two teaching staff obtained the following scores:

S.M. - Understanding emotions scored 113/ developed aptitude

R.B. - Understanding emotions scored 109/ indicating efficient functioning

Understanding emotions refers to the ability to recognize and interpret the different emotions that people experience and how these emotions affect behavior and mood. This ability involves the capacity to perceive and interpret facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and other nonverbal signals to identify the emotions that a person is feeling.

From the observations made in the classroom, the following behaviors were identified as supporting a high level of emotional understanding: The two teachers can tell when a student does not understand a task without the student expressing it verbally. Feedback is accompanied by paraverbal language, with a calm, warm, and low-tone voice. Nonverbal feedback is provided through a "broad smile," "facial expressions," "widened eyes," "hand gestures," "crossing of arms and legs," etc. This indicates that students have also picked up the ability to perceive emotions by interpreting the nonverbal language of the teachers.

This is supported by the responses given by the teachers, to two questions asked in an interview. To the question "How does verbal/nonverbal feedback from students influence you during teaching/evaluation of a lesson?" the subjects stated that feedback from students, both verbal and nonverbal or paraverbal, is very important. It is an important indicator for the entire course of the lesson. Teachers are attentive to confusion or uncertainty in the children's expressions or attitudes and thus realize that explanations need to be repeated or simplified, or another way to reach their minds needs to be found. For the inattentive or bored, their opinions or solutions/ideas are sought so that they can be anchored again in the lesson. Feedback helps to adjust the pace and flow of the transmitted information during the lesson. To the question "What do you do if a student starts crying in the middle of a lesson?" the subjects responded that a child's suffering cannot be ignored, the lesson is stopped and the problem is addressed, the child is hugged and assured that whatever happens, there is a solution. If the problem is not related to physical pain, the student is involved in an activity as a helper so that they can forget about the problem they are having (e.g., missing their mother, refusing to go to after-school classes, etc.). One subject responded strictly from an educational perspective, stating that during teaching/consolidation/recapitulation and synthesis of knowledge lessons, it has not happened that a student cried. However, it happened, sometimes, during evaluation, when some students who did not understand certain knowledge "lost" themselves in the "maze" of exercises/problems (for example, in the subject of Mathematics, when performing exercises with the order of operations, equalities/inequalities, or solving methods: the graphic method, the comparison method, etc.). The reaction was to calm the student and "guide/lead" them towards remembering some necessary elements for solving the problem.

4. Conclusion

In educational settings, emotional intelligence is particularly important for teachers and students. Teachers who are able to recognize and respond to students' emotions can create a positive and supportive learning environment, which can lead to better academic outcomes. Students who are emotionally intelligent are able to manage stress better, form positive relationships with peers and teachers, and make responsible decisions.

Analyzing the total scores, 118 the teacher R.B. – 47-year-old with 20 years of experience, and 105 – S.M the teacher 66-year with 46 years of experience, it is noticed that the teacher with more experience and older age has a lower score, which can be influenced by psychological wear and tear and a decrease in motivation that occurs with age. This fact is supported by the theory of

psychologist Reuven Bar-On, called "Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence in teachers." According to this theory, emotional intelligence is essential for a teacher's success in interacting with students. It refers to the ability to perceive, express, and regulate one's emotions, as well as to understand and influence the emotions of others. According to Bar-On's model, the older and more experienced a teacher is in the field of education, the more likely it is for their level of emotional intelligence to decrease due to psychological overload and fatigue. This can lead to a decrease in the ability to perceive children's emotions and manage their difficult behaviors.

This research aimed to highlight the importance of teacher's behavior towards their students. We live in a society where everything is changing, and we can argue that we are in a period of transition. Interpersonal relationships play an important role, both at a personal level and within the community, and they often form the foundation of a child's life in terms of developing high self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. These aspects are extremely important in becoming a well-balanced adult with an increased ability to adapt, capable of functioning in a constantly changing society.

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