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THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL SKILLS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Rezumat: Dificultățile emoționale și de comportament ale elevilor sunt rezultatul mai multor factori individuali, sociali și contextuali care lucrează în comun. Acest articol propune un cadru teoretic pentru interpretarea dificultăților emoționale și comportamentale ale elevilor din școlile primare.

Cuvinte-cheie: abilități emoționale, elevii din ciclul primar.

Social and emotional skills influence how well people adjust to their environment and how much they achieve in their lives. The development of social and emotional skills is important not only for the well-being of individuals, but also for wider communities and societies as a whole. The ability of citizens to adapt, be resourceful, respect and work well with others, and to take personal and collective responsibility is increasingly becoming the hallmark of a well-functioning society. Coupled with increasing awareness of the malleability of social and emotional skills, and their growing relevance for the future world, this has attracted renewed interest from policy makers and researchers.

In an increasingly fast-changing and diverse world, the role of social and emotional skills is becoming more important. Rising complexity and the increasing pace of technological change, call for the ability to act independently and to adjust to changes on-the-go. A faster pace of living and a shift to urban environments means people need to engage with new ways of thinking and working and diverse groups of people [1, p. 24].

Growing automatisisation means that future jobs will be less routine and will be placing additional premiums on innovation, creativity and imagination – skills that are difficult to automate. Ageing and more diverse populations and the dismantling of traditional social networks place additional emphasis on people's sense of trust, co-operation and compassion.

OECD organisation defines social emotional skills as “the set of abilities that regulate our thoughts, emotions, and behaviour.” Those skills are generally categorised differently from other cognitive abilities.

Roberts A. (2009) defines „emotional skills” personality traits as “relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that reflect the tendency to respond in certain ways under certain circumstances”. “Relatively enduring patterns” means that personality traits tend to be consistent characteristics of an individual, but it is important to note that they are not set in stone and, in fact, are susceptible to change [5, p. 2] “Tendency to respond in certain ways under certain circumstances” means that a trait's influence on behaviour is not definite, but rather that it increases or decreases the likelihood that certain actions will occur in particular situations. In other words, personality characteristics represent habitual responses to everyday situations.

Emotional development is a complex process that begins in infancy and continues through adulthood. The first emotions that can be recognised in babies include joy, anger, sadness and fear. As children's sense of self develops, more complex emotions like shyness, surprise, elation, embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride and empathy emerge. School-aged children and young people are still learning to identify emotions, understand why they happen, and how to manage them appropriately.

Emotional expression includes several components such as:

- physical responses (like heart rate, breathing and hormone levels);
- behavioural displays of emotion;
- feelings that children and young people recognise and learn to name;
- thoughts and judgments associated with feelings;
- action signals (for example, a desire to approach, escape or fight).

Influences on emotional expression include:

- values and beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing emotions that children and young people learn from families and educators;
- how effectively children and young people's emotional needs are usually met;
- children and young people's temperaments;
- cultural norms;
- emotional behaviours that children and young people have learned through observation or experience;
- the extent to which families are under various kinds of stress.

The rate of emotional development in children and young people varies from person to person. Some children may show a high level of emotional skill development while quite young, whereas others may still be developing the capacity to manage their emotions well into adolescence.

A person's sense of self is strongly influenced by their perception of themselves. Knowing that they can be successful at what they do allows children and young people

to feel competent and confident – which, in turn, affects their emotional development. Children and young people who don't have many experiences of success can experience disappointment more often, which can lead to development of a negative sense of self. By being supported to learn to value their own strengths and efforts, as well as those of others, children and young people develop resilience to bounce back from challenges and hardship [3, p. 5].

Providing effective support for children and young people's emotional development starts with paying attention to their feelings and noticing how they manage them. Many learning communities incorporate specific programs to teach social and emotional skills. These skills can also be taught and learned through everyday interactions. Tune in to children and young people's feelings and emotions. Some emotions are easily identified, while others are less obvious. Tuning in to children and young people's emotions involves looking at their body language, listening to what they're saying and how they're saying it, and observing their behaviour. This allows you to respond more effectively to their needs and to offer more specific guidance to help them manage their emotions. Help children and young people recognise and understand emotions.

Talking to primary school students and teaching them about emotions helps them to become more aware of their own behaviour, as well as that of others. It also helps them to better manage their own emotions over time. Here is describe a several advice:

Set limits-let students know that it's normal and OK to have a range of emotions and feelings. Teach language and skills for dealing with strong or difficult emotions, such as anger and frustration, in a positive way. It's also important to set limits on aggressive, unsafe or inappropriate behaviours.

Be a role model-Showing students different ways you understand and manage emotions helps them learn from your example. If you lose your temper, apologise and show how you might make amends.

Children start developing them as babies, and new skills emerge as they get older. Not all kids develop at the same pace. But there are some milestones you can expect kids to meet around roughly the same age. See this list of social and emotional milestones at different ages. Social and emotional skills at different ages by Amanda Morin:

Ages 5–6 years:

- Enjoy playing with other kids and are more conversational and independent;
- Test boundaries but are still eager to please and help out;
- Begin to understand what it means to feel embarrassed.

Ages 7–8 years:

- Are more aware of others' perceptions;
- May complain about friendships and other kids' reactions;
- Want to behave well, but aren't as attentive to directions;
- Try to express feelings with words, but may resort to aggression when upset.

Ages 9–10 years:

- Share secrets and jokes with friends;
- May start to develop own identity by withdrawing from family activities and conversations;
- Are affectionate, silly, and curious, but can also be selfish, rude, and argumentative;

- Remember that all kids develop social and emotional skills differently. If kids don't meet every milestone for their age right away, that's OK.

If you're concerned that a child isn't hitting many of these milestones, keep track of what you're seeing. Share your concerns with others who can help. Parents, caregivers, teachers, and health care providers can all play a role in helping kids build social and emotional skills [4, p. 3].

Children grow and develop rapidly in their first five years across the four main areas of development. These areas are physical, communication and language, cognitive and social emotional. Social and emotional development means how children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling and what to expect when interacting with others. It is the development of being able to: form and sustain positive relationships; experience, manage and express emotions; Explore and engage with the environment. Positive social and emotional development is important. This development influences a child's self-confidence, empathy, the ability to develop meaningful and lasting friendships and partnerships, and a sense of importance and value to those around him/her. Children's social and emotional development also influences all other areas of development. Parents and caregivers play the biggest role in social and emotional development because they offer the most consistent relationships for their child. Consistent experiences with family members, teachers and other adults help children learn about relationships and explore emotions in predictable interactions. To nurture your child's social and emotional development, it is important that you engage in quality interactions like these on a daily basis, depending on the age of your child:

- Be affectionate and nurturing: hold, comfort, talk and sing with your baby, toddler and child.
- Help your baby experience joy in "give-and-take" relationships by playing games like "peek-a-boo."
- Provide your toddler with responsive care, letting them practice new skills while still providing hands-on help.
- Support your child's developing skills; help him/her, but don't do everything for your child, even if it takes longer or is messy.
- Teach social and emotional skills, such as taking turns, listening and resolving conflict.

Social emotional skills develop in line with personality. That's why it would be better to recall the well-known *Big Five Theory on personality traits* while talking about the types of social emotional skills. In agreement with many personality psychologists, Namrata P. (2015) defines the broad categories of the Big Five as follows:

- Openness to experience (open-mindedness);
- Conscientiousness (task performance);
- Emotional stability (emotional regulation);
- Extraversion (engaging with others);
- Agreeableness (collaboration) [5, p. 3].

In the OECD's study on social emotional skills, which is based on their international survey assessing 6 and 10-year-old students, it is estimated that there are 15 social emotional skills around The Big Five traits with an additional compound skill [1, p. 123].

These skills can be listed and defined as below:

- *Achievement orientation*: Setting high standards and working hard to meet them.
- *Responsibility*: Ability to honor commitments, and be punctual and reliable.
- *Self-control*: Ability to avoid distractions and focus attention on the current task in order to achieve personal goals.
- *Persistence*: Perseverance in tasks and activities until they are finished.
- *Stress resistance*: Effectiveness in modulating anxiety and ability to calmly solve problems (being relaxed, handling stress well).
- *Optimism*: Positive and optimistic expectations for self and life in general.
- *Emotional control*: Effective strategies for regulating temper, anger, and irritation in the face of frustrations.
- *Empathy*: Kindness and caring for others and their well-being that leads to valuing and investing in close relationships.
- *Trust*: Assuming that others generally have good intentions and forgiving those who have done wrong.
- *Cooperation*: Living in harmony with others and valuing interconnectedness among all people.
- *Curiosity*: Interest in ideas and love of learning, understanding, and intellectual exploration; an inquisitive mindset. *Tolerance*: Openness to different points of view, valuing diversity, and appreciating foreign people and cultures. *Creativity*: Generating novel ways to do or think about things through exploring, learning from failure, insight, and vision.
- *Sociability*: Ability to approach others, both friends and strangers, initiating and maintaining social emotional connections.
- *Assertiveness*: Ability to confidently voice opinions, needs, and feelings, and exert social emotional influence.
- *Energy*: Approaching daily life with energy, excitement, and spontaneity.
- *Self-efficacy*: Strong belief in personal ability to execute tasks and achieve goals.
- *Independence*: Ability to evaluate information and interpret it through independent and unconstrained analysis.
- *Self-reflection/Meta-cognition*: Awareness of inner processes and subjective experiences such as thoughts and feelings, and the ability to reflect on and articulate such experiences.



Figure 1. The „Big Five” domains of social emotional learning by Namrat P.

Social emotional learning is an important process especially for students because it can help boost student's success. Social emotional learning is said to increase success by an average of 11 points. This is due to the development of prosocial behavior such as kindness, sharing and empathy.

Social emotional learning also improves students' attitudes towards school and reduces depression and stress among students. An effective social emotional learning programme includes a coordinated classroom, school, family and community practices that help students develop the following five core skills:

- *Self-Awareness*: It is the ability to perceive one's own feelings, thoughts, and accurately recognize how they affect their own values and behavior.
- *Self-Management*: It is the ability to successfully organize emotions, thoughts and behaviors. For example, the ability to set personal and academic goals, and work towards them.
- *Social Awareness*: The ability to understand, take and empathize with others' perspectives, including those with different cultures and cultivation environments.
- *Relationship Skills*: The ability to establish and maintain mutually healthy and rewarding relationships with different individuals and groups.
- *Responsible Decision-Making*: To be able to make constructive choices about ethical behaviours, decisions regarding security concerns, personal behaviour based on social norms and social interactions [2, p. 22].



Figure 2. Social emotional learning by Lauran Cole

Here are some strategic actions that will help you guide your child in improving their social emotional learning skills [3, p. 6]:

- Define and verbalize your children's emotions: If they are crying, tell them "You look sad" or "It looks like you are mad right now." This way you can reflect their emotions to them with words and help them understand and verbalize them too.

- Approve your children’s feelings: Instead of saying “Stop shouting and calm down, it’s not a big deal” try to say “I know you are really angry right now but we can talk about it.” This way you can show them that it’s sometimes okay to have big feelings.
- Try to build some empathy together: Ask them “Can you show me how your friend’s face was when you hit him?” This way they will learn to show empathy in regards to what others could have felt.
- Give your kid some space and let them experience uncomfortable feelings: Everyone feels alone or bored sometimes. Teach them how to handle those feelings instead of avoiding them. This will help them tolerate disturbing feelings and situations going forward.
- Accept emotions & correct behaviours: It’s okay to feel angry sometimes. Eventually, we need to feel that anger in some specific situations. However, it is never acceptable to show aggressive behaviours. Teach your children that the feeling is normal, but they shouldn’t be screaming loudly in a public area just because they are feeling an emotion as this may make other people uncomfortable.
- Support other cognitive skills: Improving verbal and mathematical skills will also support children’s social emotional development, as they affect communication and reasoning abilities.
- Scientific educational brain games apps developed by academicians.

In conclusion every parent should keep in mind that all kids can shape and develop their social and emotional skills differently. Trying to find ways that suit your kids’ needs, interests and according to learning styles (such as visual, sensory, cognitive or auditory learning style) is always a better solution than blaming yourself or the kids. We are all social emotional beings and throughout our lives, we all continue to shape our behaviours and relationships.

However, for lifelong well-being, the development of social emotional skills should be shaped wisely as a child opens its eyes to this world. Early ages are especially important for kids as they explore the world and every concept related to it. They are so eager to learn new things and they shape a future with what they have learnt in their childhood.

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