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**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND
SOCIAL SKILLS AT SCHOOL AGE**

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Abstract

Awareness of emotions is the basic skill for the purchase all other skills, allowing understanding the emotional feelings of their own and of the other, what favors on the one hand the transmission of appropriate messages with the emotional content and on the other hand, the correct interpretation of the messages with emotional content received from the other. Emotional skills are developed, largely by involving children in discussions regarding emotions, expression or inhibition of emotional manifestation, attitude towards events, facts and queries from social and educational environment. Children learn about emotions and about how they can be managed properly, in the context of social interactions. Acquiring the social and emotional skills requires an optimal interaction of all the intra- and interpersonal factors, that can represent a source of protection, ensuring an efficient adaptation of the child to the environmental requirements. Emotional skills influence the development of social skills, in their absence, being difficult initiating and maintaining relationships with people around. Empathy is the substrate to develop the skills of cooperation, of offering aid the necessary for integration in the group.

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1. Introduction

The last two decades research, on preparing children for school, was made from an integrative perspective, giving up on the emphasis on the strictly cognitive aspects of school training, taking into account the relationship between knowledge, cognition and affectivity and its role in the ability of developing the self-regulation, as a prerequisite for adaptation to school requirements. The moment when the concept of "emotional intelligence" appeared was one in which educators were facing numerous problems in school activities, for which they found no answers (conduct disorder, extent of conflict and violence between students).

For a long time, scientists have found that *intelligence* is a key predictor of success in school.

Next to it, the "*self-regulation*" indicator, which is independent of intelligence, being an equally strong predictor, as well as the "*emotionality*" and certain "*traits of temperament*" are involved in achieving a balance between the demands of the academic environment and the child's potential to meet them (Stănculescu, 2008, p. 94).

2. The Concept of Emotional Intelligence

The concept of *emotional intelligence* has been used for the first time in the literature by D. Coleman in 1995, in the study entitled "*Emotional Intelligence*" (Stănculescu, 2008, p. 263), the author considering it "*as powerful, sometimes twice stronger than the intelligence coefficient*".

These statements were taken by professional publications of the time, being found numerous references stating that the so-called coefficient of emotional intelligence is the best predictor of success in life, redefining this way the meaning of "*being smart*".

Efficient use of emotional charged information has an important role in the adaptation process and thus in achieving personal emotional comfort.

Emotional intelligence was defined as a set of skills on which an individual can discriminate and monitor the emotions of self and others, as well as his ability to use his knowledge to guide his own thinking and behaviour (Catrinel, Kallay, 2010, p. 11).

Analyzing the problem of the general intelligence (IQ) contribution to achieving success, both in life and at work and in the learning activities, Goleman (2008, pp. 198-199) notes that it depends on the *general intelligence* in a proportion of 20%, which helps us to solve problems, make calculations, to process information and in a proportion of 80% on the *emotional intelligence* (EQ), that allows us to be creative and use our emotions to solve our problems.

The difference between a person with a high IQ, who integrates with difficulty in the socio-professional life, and a person with a modest IQ, who manages well, is provided by emotional intelligence, which includes, in turn, self-control, perseverance and a strong automotivation capacity (Stănculescu, 2008, p. 263).

The investigation of the "*emotional intelligence*" has highlighted the catalytic role of these skills in various areas of life. Labor psychology research has shown, for instance, that in the leadership positions, success is guaranteed in 85% of the cases by a high level of emotional intelligence, and for adults, 2/3 of the problems caused by stress are due to the abusive, unsatisfactorily or poorly defined relationships.

H. Gardner (Golu, & Golu, 2003, p. 73-82) shows that there are the following types of emotional intelligence:

- *spatial intelligence* (the ability to see structures and forms accurately, which enables a facile expression through drawings, photographs, etc.);
- *kinesthetic intelligence* (the ability to use the body with precision, coordinating the movements well and being able to understand all the nuances of a movement);
- *musical intelligence* (the ability to identify the style of a composer and get to know different musical scores);

- *linguistic intelligence* (the ability to easily learn a foreign language or develop a rich vocabulary);
- *logical-mathematical intelligence* (the ability to easily solve problems and to feel pleasure when working with numbers);
- *interpersonal intelligence* and *intrapersonal intelligence* (capabilities that help you understand the feelings of others and respectively to understand your own feelings).

School experience has shown that while the IQ does not change very much after adolescence, emotional intelligence (especially the aspect of interpersonal and intrapersonal) is largely learned and continue to develop as one gets older and learns to recognize emotions and feelings and use them positively.

3. The Main Components of Emotional Intelligence

3.1. Emotional Intelligence - Concept

The main components of *emotional intelligence* are (Catrinel, Kallay, 2010, p. 11):

- the ability to properly understand and interpret emotions of self and others;
- the ability to acknowledge and express emotions that can facilitate thinking;
- the ability to properly understand the emotionally charged information and effectively use the knowledge about emotions;
- the ability to manage their own emotions towards intellectual and emotional development and to achieve wellbeing.

For the learning activity, *positive emotional experiences* represents a premise to achieving academic success. The success of learning activities is encouraged by the intensity of the emotional experiences, their duration, the expressiveness of emotional feelings that allows emotional communication and the educator's call to empathy as an ability to transpose themselves in someone else's situation.

Emotional skills are developed largely by involving children in discussions regarding emotions, expression or inhibition of emotional manifestation, attitude towards events, facts and queries from social and educational environment.

Social skills refer to the children's abilities of forming functional social relationships, easing positive interactions, appropriate to the socio-cultural norms, thus reaching their goals, respecting at the same time the needs of others.

The main risk factors in the development of emotional and social skills in children were grouped in intrapersonal and interpersonal factors (Catrinel, Kallay, 2010, p. 38).

The intrapersonal factors can be further *biological* and *cognitive*.

Biological factors relate to the genetic, innate component, influencing how the child reacts to environmental stimuli (internal or external), being visible through the behavioral reactions. One of the genetic components is the temperament, manifested by predispositions at the level of emotional and behavioral characteristics.

A brief analysis of the main temperamental manifestations at children, made the division into three categories possible:

- children with *easy temperament* (well adapted in social terms, interrelate easily, follow the rules, effectively manage their emotions)
- children with *difficult temperament* (not respecting the rules, have difficulty following the instructions, are aggressive and show anger when they do not get what they want, have difficulties in managing reactions of anger and aggression, are frustrated in situations in which they must wait their turn)
- children with *difficult to start temperament* (are withdrawn, avoid interactions with others, express emotions and desires rarely, often need encouragement from adults, are shy, prone to social isolation, sad).

It is well known that temperament cannot be significantly changed over time, but providing appropriate behavior models at the right time, that children can acquire, can counteract the innate shortcomings of the reactions. Experiences and how children learn social behaviors are a source of compensation of possible deficits.

The second category of intrapersonal factors is represented by the *cognitive* ones, who have the strongest impact on emotional and social skills. They can be divided in turn in two categories: the *theory of mind* and *language development level*.

3.2. The theory of mind

The theory of mind represents the ability to read the minds of others, the child's ability to understand that other people may have thoughts and emotions different from their own, which can explain the behavior of others, based on less obvious cues, such as desires or beliefs.

Children with underdeveloped mind theory have difficulties initiating and maintaining relationships with others, do not cooperate, do not offer their help, their social experiences are characterized by failure, frustration and can reach mental health problems.

The adequate language development provides a more shaded verbal communication, increasing the chances of higher quality social interactions.

Children can initiate discussions about emotions, which facilitates the understanding and recognition of their own emotions and those of others, may require explanations and clarifications from adults, can establish the relationship between cause and effect of events - emotional reactions - behavior. Children with poor language development or who have speech disorders are far less likely to interact effectively with others, having limited chances to acquire the skills necessary to an optimal socio-emotional adaptation (Catrinel, Kallay, 2010, p. 39).

They could be stimulated to develop their emotional skills in classroom activities through:

- conducting activities in which students have to recognize and describe positive and negative emotions;
- encouraging students to write in a journal about their own emotions and feelings;

- recognizing the emotions of others and within their own emotions - description of characters, different role playing, dramatizations that can access many resources inner child;
- learning new coping and negative emotions managing strategies through discussion, role play, that one can analyze and apply alternatives to replace the states of rage, anger, anxiety and sadness;
- modeling - teachers represent examples of emotional balance by how they defuse and manage negative emotions and moods.

Acquiring the social and emotional skills requires an optimal interaction of all the intra- and interpersonal factors, that can represent a source of protection, ensuring an efficient adaptation of the child to the environmental requirements. On the other hand, the improper interaction of these factors can contribute to a deficient development of these social and emotional skills, that can develop into sources of serious mental and emotional disorders.

In our view, the optimal emotional development represents one of the most important components of adaptation, being necessary to maintain mental health and influencing the development of social relations.

Awareness of the emotions is the basic ability to purchase all the other competences, allowing the understanding of self and others emotional experiences, which favors, on one hand, sending appropriate messages with emotional content and, on the other hand, the correct interpretation of messages with emotional content received from others.

Both, pre-school and school children, learn about emotions and about the way they can be managed properly in the context of social interactions. Emotional competencies influence the development of social skills, being difficult to initiate and maintain relationships with people around in their absence. In this regard, empathy represents the substrate of the cooperation development and of the aid offering, necessary to the group integration.

Social competencies refer to children's ability to form social functional relationships with other children and with adults in their lives, facilitating positive interactions, appropriate to cultural norms, so as to attain their own ends, while respecting at the same time the needs of others.

Intrapersonal social skills are closely related to emotional skills, and acquiring emotional regulation strategies favors the capacity to exercise control over their behavior, being essential for establishing and maintaining relationships with others.

Same age children may be different in terms of the level of socio-emotional skills development, which in turn are strongly influenced by a number of intra- and interpersonal factors. The development of socio-emotional skills is the result of environmental influences the child is born and lives in, as well as the family and educational environments, acting on the genetic component the child is born with.

Independent to the genetically transmitted intellectual potential, it can be "instilled" to children a number of features, such as self-control, perseverance and activity motivation, which will become in time, premises for success in life.

Worldwide, making a comparison with previous generations, it can be determined an alarming development of emotional problems in children, manifested by emotion, anxiety, depression, instability

and aggression, that become very easy determinants of school failure and subsequently leading to dropout or even aberrant behaviour.

In recent years, were not few the voices of psychologists who argue the need to introduce into the curriculum courses to enable children to familiarize with the specifics of human qualities, which are important to the life of each individual, such as self-control and empathy, self-awareness, the art of listening, the art of mediating and solving conflicts, to cooperate (Stănculescu, 2008, p. 268), which will allow for future adults, to manage their life through emotional intelligence, contextual cut-out situations with personal ways of expressing their affective experiences.

There can be mentioned a number of modalities of exercising of the main dimensions of emotional intelligence (Stănculescu, 2008, p.267):

- *awareness of own emotions* - involving recognition and naming of a wide range of emotional experiences, discerning the causes of their triggers, recognizing the differences between the feelings and the actions determined by them;
- *control of emotions* - implies resistance to frustration, mastery of the uncontrolled outbursts and natural expression of negative emotions, without an aggressive manifestation, building a positive self-image and adopting a favorable attitude towards family and school;
- *personal motivation* – induces the need to exploit emotions in a positive sense, by cultivating responsibility and the ability to concentrate on a task;
- *empathy* - promotes sensitivity to the feelings of others, being possible by:
 - a) ideative-imaginative transposition in ones interiority and taking over the way of thinking and achieving the social role (cognitive empathy);
 - b) emotional transposition, consisting of reliving the emotional-affective states of one with whom he identifies with (emotional empathy).
- *directing interpersonal relationships* - requires:
 - a) cultivating skills to understand and analyze interactions with others;
 - b) the ability to negotiate and resolve conflictual situations;
 - c) developing the communication skills (assertiveness);
 - d) easy establishment of inter-group relations;
 - e) spirit of cooperation;
 - f) approaching a pro-social behaviour.

Specialized studies conducted in the last two decades reveal that the emotional intelligence deficit increases the risk factor in the long term, concretized in failure in the couple life, in the parent role, in the occurrence of violence, in psychological instability, dependence on alcohol, drugs or food.

It was also found that there was a positive correlation between low emotional intelligence scores and high scores on the anxiety and depression scales. Children who come from dysfunctional families or who have been abandoned by their parents, have reduced emotional skills, and those who live in an emotionally disorganized climate, are very aggressive, impulsive and very anxious.

To achieve positive results, which may be induced by the stimulation of emotional intelligence in educational practice, a solid research is needed, leading to the shaping of new curriculum materials. The need to approach certain disciplines to develop social and emotional skills of students, was given by the desire to prevent violent behaviour, juvenile delinquency, access to weapons, drugs, smoking, dropping

out of school. The results of these classes will be visible where students will learn to control impulses, anger and will find appropriate solutions in problematic situations.

Karen Stone McCowen, founder of the concept of "The *Nueva School*" in 1967 in Hillsborough and San Mateo, California, believes that there should not be a separation between the cognitive development and the affective development, stating that "*emotional literacy*" is as important as the learning of the specific knowledge of exact or social sciences.

Found under different names such as "*Skills needed in life*", "*Self Science*", "*Social Development*", "*Social and Emotional Study*", the discipline concerned discusses topics taken from everyday life, taken from discussing actual cases, which concern children, such as misunderstandings that may degenerate into violence, suffering from being marginalized, helplessness in the face of failure, envy, anger. All subjects addressed by teachers in this discipline are related to the concerns of children, being examples of everyday life, leading to a better understanding of their self and building the capacity to establish harmonious interpersonal relationships and making their own decisions correct.

Teaching knowledge about the emotional-affective sphere must be embodied in the curriculum, taking into account the mentality particularities of the students. An important role in this regard lies with educators who will teach students to perceive the fundamental emotional experiences, to name emotions and feelings they are aware of and to express them and using non-verbal language.

Children may be familiarized with more subtle meanings of messages using paralinguistic elements that accompany verbal communication, such as speech intonation or modulation speed.

Correct perception of own emotions and those with which the child interacts, is the most effective way to avoid distortions in different contextual situations through effective management of their affective reactions, being possible to prevent conflicts.

Optimal emotional development is one of the most important components of adaptation, being necessary to maintain mental health, influencing the development and maintenance of social relations.

4. The Concept of Emotional Competence

4.1. Emotional Competence - Concept

The concept of *emotional competence* defines the human ability to recognize and interpret their own and others emotions and the ability to adequately manage emotionally charged situations.

Emotional competencies are classified into three categories (Catrinel, Kallay, 2010, p.18):

- *living and expressing emotions* (awareness of their own emotional experiences, adequately sending emotionally charged messages, expression of empathy);
- *understanding and recognition of emotions* (identifying emotions based on nonverbal cues, naming emotions - "I am happy," "I'm sad" - understanding the causes and consequences of emotions);
- *emotional regulation* (using age-appropriate emotional regulation strategies).

Children's experiences in dealing with professors, help them to learn about the rules of expressing emotions, their recognition and about emotional regulation (Cucos, coord, 2008, p.515).

Therefore, emotional skills develop largely through social practices used by parents (having discussions about emotions, attitude towards conflicts, expression or inhibition of emotional manifestations).

Emotional competencies influence the development of social skills, being difficult in their absence to initiate and maintain relationships with people around. In this respect, empathy is the substrate of the development of the cooperational and offering aid skills, which are needed to integrate into the group.

5. Conclusion

We feel, social competencies refer to children's ability to form functional social relationships with other children and adults in their lives, facilitating positive interactions, appropriate to cultural norms, so as to attain their own purposes, while respecting the needs of others. Any social behavior is the result of a learning process of what is "valued" by society (greeting is a polite way to initiate interaction with a stranger). Because these behaviors are perceived as adequate, their manifestation will be encouraged and will therefore be repeated in similar contexts. These behaviors help us achieve certain goals, with the condition of allowing us to initiate and establish a relationship with someone else.

Social skills can be divided into *interpersonal skills of relating and problem solving* (when a student interacts with other students through games and other activities, initiates interactions with other children, offers and asks for help, waits for his turn, use polite forms of addressing, resolves conflicts through age-appropriate strategies, resorting to the help of an adult, avoiding, negotiating or making small compromises) and *intrapersonal skills* (when the student follows the rules that were established with the parent or educator, tolerates situations that cause frustration).

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