

**ERD 2017**  
**Education, Reflection, Development, Fifth Edition**

**DEVELOPING SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS OF CHILDREN.  
APPLICATIONS IN FORMATIVE CONTEXTS**

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***Abstract***

Socio-emotional development is a key component that is found in all areas of action. The social and emotional skills are strong related to the intellectual abilities of a person. The current educational approaches reconsider the socio-emotional development of the child by prioritizing the development of the child's personality by coordinating activities designed to empathize, understand, accept, tolerate, and identify solutions in crisis situations. Based on the above, a fundamental idea is outlined, namely: Positive emotions are generated and maintained only in interaction with others. This is the solid argument of socio-emotional education, a form of successful education for a person capable of success. Emotional intelligence includes among its features, the following: better understanding of our emotions, effective emotional management and increasing the quality of life, better understanding of others and a high level of comfort in people's relationships, as well as creating better relationships at all levels with people around us and last but not least, increasing productivity while improving your personal image. Childhood has become a period of major importance for the development of social and emotional skills. Parents play an important role in this context, but the teachers are also significant for a harmonious socio-emotional development of the child.

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**Keywords:** Strategies, emotional intelligence, educational context.



## **1. Introduction**

Pedagogical and psychological studies conducted in the recent years have shown that a person's performances are significantly influenced by his intellectual abilities, but they are not decisive for his life's success. Socio-emotional development is considered the foundation of relationships in the interactions with other children, adults and the community. These formed socio-emotional skills give meaning to children's experiences and contribute for highlighting their success in school and in life. Socio-emotional development is a phrase that is found in all areas of action.

Daniel Goleman emphasizes the need to involve the family in knowing skills of recognizing their own emotions, the reactions of the interlocutors to our emotions, how to filter these reactions or how to identify and express our fears. Success depends today on a good socio-emotional setting but, unfortunately, this component is neglected. Family and school escape from these responsibilities, children don't stay 7 years at home, the family puts pressure on kindergarten and school to take responsibility for early socio-emotional development, and the school accuses the family of massive abandonment in this direction. Parents are the key agents of socialization and children are exposed daily to their emotions. These will be incorporated into the children's cognitive concepts of social interaction, which can influence the behavioural manifestation of emotional competence (empathy towards others, ability to co-operate and moderate conflict by understanding emotions and abilities to integrate into a group). Negative and positive emotions expressed by adults (especially parents) and how to regulate these emotions are related to the emotional competence of children. Adults (parents, educators) are those who contribute to the development of children's emotional competence through what is called the socialization of emotions.

In the book " Emotionally Intelligent Parenting", it is also highlighted the need for the first school of emotions and family relationships. This is not only about the amount of information transmitted by the parents, but about what they are willing to do for the children, what are the models offered by parents in the treatment of their emotions. On the basis of the above, a fundamental idea is outlined, namely: positive emotions are generated and maintained only in interaction with others.

This is the solid argument of socio-emotional education, a form of successful education for a man capable of success.

The value of the basic indicators of emotional intelligence has decreased considerably, as there is a significant increase in the number of impulsive and violent children, but especially lonely, sad and vulnerable ones. All these indicators lead to a visible degradation of the essential quality of character. On the one hand immediately visible factors are determined by the technological explosion and on the other hand by the socio-economic spheres in which parents are caught, causing a malfunctioning circuit with long-term effects. This will result in a shortage of the "quality time" spent with the baby. As far as the technological aspect is concerned, humanity practices a fulminating experience, and children choose to access virtual programs, in the detriment of interrelation with other children, becoming subject to multiple influences and sources of distraction, the result of lack of parental control leading to the multiplication of behavioural disorders.

Childhood has undergone various changes due to limited interactions with others, a poor experimentation of the play time in all its meanings. This debilitating state of emotional development

should alert parents and other actors involved in the educational act to launching effective involvement initiatives to support children in acquiring social and emotional skills that are considered to be life-sustaining. Parents are the ones who offer, from the earliest age, the main model of relationship, respect and understanding of family experiences, without neglecting the role of emotions and their management in the healthy development of the child.

## **2. Curricular approaches to socio-emotional education**

In the book "Emotionally Intelligent Parenting", the authors draw attention to the current educational approaches, reconsider the socio-emotional development of the child, prioritizing the development of child's personality by coordinating activities designed to form empathy, understanding, perception, tolerance and identification of solutions in some crisis situation. In the development of this theme, a series of questions were identified, such as: what can education based on emotional intelligence in the family can do? First, it will provide more peace and less stressful situations. It is a way of regaining our balance senses when worries overwhelm us or children begin to fight, when cooperation becomes conflict, or when adolescents revolt, and in all of these situations family members don't know what to do first (Elias, Tobias & Friendlander, 2000) .

Another obvious question is: who has the capability to achieve this socio-emotional development? Some teachers, but also parents, intervene in the effect, but the results of the intervention are visible only at the level of conformism, as long as it does not intervene on the cause of the conflict.

A fundamental idea is highlighted by the need to respect the child's bio-psychic potential. Recognizing your own emotions first is mandatory in supporting children in their work of identifying, recognizing and exercising emotions in a constructive manner.

The authors of the book " Emotionally Intelligent Parenting ", emphasize the need to know their own feelings at the beginning, the need to control their own impulses, the need to be non-reactive. Education based on emotional intelligence is an education that leads to regaining the sense of balance when we consider that concern overwhelms us (Elias at al., 2000). Education based on emotional intelligence must take into account the pressure that parents face each day and provide them with a realistic solution. To prepare the for a child a healthy socio-emotional climate is needed, in which socio-emotional skills are learned, developed and applied (Elias et al., 2000).

In Romania, the curriculum for preschool education is the educational policy document that guides through its content the entire activity of the teaching staff in pre-school education and promotes as the basic principles of early education the following:

- a) The holistic approach to child development, which implies equal attention to all areas of development: physical and health development, language and communication development, cognitive development, development of learning capacities and attitudes and socio-emotional development.
- b) Promoting and practicing child-centered education and its global development in the context of interaction with the natural and social environment.
- c) Reporting the entire educational process to age and individual peculiarities.

- d) Each child is unique and they must have equal opportunities to play, learn and develop according to their potential.
- e) Avoiding teacher's discriminatory expressions and prejudices.
- f) Selection of diversity - no culture is superior to another.
- g) Centering educational approaches on the needs of families in order to create a close partnership with them.
- h) Focusing on the principles of authentic and meaningful learning. The child is the author of his / her own learning through his / her active involvement and interaction with the environment, in significant contexts for his / her age and individual peculiarities.
- i) Respecting the consistency and continuity of the Curriculum for early education of children between birth and 6/7 and respecting coherence and continuity with the Curriculum for Primary Education.
- j) Compliance with European and international standards on early education.

For the first time, we can talk about the Domain of socio-emotional development with its dimensions:

- Social development, according to RFIDT, consists into the acquirement of the skills of interacting with other people (adults and children), accepting and respecting diversity, developing prosocial behaviours.

- Emotional development aims at developing the self-concept, developing the ability to self-regulate their emotional experiences, developing emotional expressiveness.

These landmarks are expressed as the ultimate expectations for early childhood, exemplified by indicators that reflect what behaviours are desirable at the end of each age group. New challenges for researchers and practitioners have arisen: what are the skills, competences or individual characteristics that a person requires in order to be successful?

Moving from the peculiarities of the family environment to the approaches of these concepts at the institutional level, we can exploit the results of the research on the approach of these theories. Social and emotional learning or SEL is the complex process by which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to: understand and control emotions, set and achieve personal goals, show and feel empathy toward others, establish and maintain positive relationships with others, taking responsible decisions. Until recently, the emphasis on education has been on school performance, research has argued in recent decades that emotional skills are prerequisite for learning and thinking skills (Elias et al., 1997), and have effects on perceptions, motivation, critical thinking and on behaviour (Izard, Trentacosta, King & Mostow, 2004; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

A meta-analysis published in 2011 (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger) on the impact of intervention programs on social and emotional learning, takes into account only those programs that are SAFE (sequenced, active, focused and explicit). This is why, in the past years, education specialists have highlighted the need to introduce disciplines focusing on the social and emotional development of the preschool and primary children in the fields studied in the school. This is a matter that naturally determines pedagogy to restore its research and intervention paths.

The social relationships of children significantly influence the development of their personality, each stage being "the equivalent of the sum of all interpersonal relationships, starting, of course, with the relationship it has with the parents, but including the significant influence of its own age." (Sullivan, 1953, p.218). The child learns through interactions with cognitive, emotional and social things, his own knowledge are being confronted with the others and knowing a certain alteration and adaptation, all these things are being introduced into his cognitive system under this form. In the pre-school, the child does not move away from the influence of the parents, but it tends to get the attention of the teacher and his / her colleagues, but also the affection, appreciation and support he / she needs. Within the group of children, he gets these things as a reward for the way he/she acts and reacts emotionally and socially.

At this stage, interactions and friendships established between children leave a major imprint on how the child will relate to others throughout their lives. By interacting with children, the child practices cooperation, ability to establish and maintain friendship, learns to take into account the wishes and needs of others, learns to respect the rights of other children. Also, social contact with other children is an important source in observing the differences and similarities between people, the diversity of people in many ways. Children's ability to recognize and express their own emotions, to master, to control, to understand and to respond to the emotions of others is an important step in the child's emotional development.

The central place, however, is the development of the concept of "self", the perception and self-image of the child: features, capacities, motivations, desires, needs, preferences, social roles. Equally important is the self-confidence, the conviction that it can do what it proposes, independence and personal responsibility, feelings that fuel and support the children's natural desire for knowledge, exploration and discovery.

### 3. Conclusion

In more and more educational institutions from Romania, children are considered the key elements of their own training. Year after year, all factors involved in the development of cognitive skills, and in the acquisition of as much information and knowledge as possible, are losing sight that the social and emotional skills are equally important for their success in life, or simply in order to cope with school life. He learns to write and read, but doesn't learn anything about responsibility and resilience. The children own top-level mathematics, have extraordinary account abilities, but don't feel the need to learn perseverance and courage. They don't know how to solve their own conflicts, they aren't taught to cooperate or to find solutions in a team, or working with other people.

All assessments take into account knowledge and cognitive skills, everything is related to them, avoiding or simply ignoring the part of socio-emotional skills - although since the 1990s, countless studies have clearly demonstrated the determining role of these skills in shaping a harmonious personality of the child and its success in life.

Once self-confidence is built, the child is, of course, more open to new experiences, more willing to ask questions and express opinions without fear of failure. Another factor with a positive impact on learning experiences is the friendship and cooperation relationship within the student group. According

to Piaget's constructivist theory, children learn first and foremost through direct contact with the environment. In addition to this theory comes Vygotsky's approach, according to which learning, by definition, is a social process (Daniels, 2001). It is easy to conclude that, as part of a homogeneous group with well-established rules and limits, a group in which tolerance, respect and understanding are found, the child is exposed to several spontaneous learning experiences.

Important issues concerning the development of socio-emotional skills are often neglected, in favor of overly formalized approaches, with an emphasis on acquiring information rather than on the formation of socially desirable behaviors and attitudes. Living in an era of globalization, where borders continue to fall, and the world is in a constant economic, political and cultural change, it is imperative to prepare future adults in order to adapt to a society that is always changing and moving.

Emotional intelligence includes these essential characteristics: better understanding of our emotions, effective emotional management and increasing the quality of life, better understanding of others and a high level of comfort in people's relationships, as well as creating better relationships at all levels with people around us and last but not least, increasing productivity while improving your personal image.

According to statistical research, emotional competence is twice as important as technical or intellectual skills. Developing emotional intelligence means understanding and managing emotions to create harmonious relationships with others. In school, high emotional intelligence is the key to successful counseling. Among the benefits of increasing emotional intelligence, we can mention: increased performance, improved motivation, increased innovation, increased self-confidence, efficient management and team work comfort.

Positive social relationships are formed when children understand the meaning of different behaviors, when they are able to adapt to different social contexts and are involved in group activities. Osterrieth (1976) says that socialization of children is based on kindergarden and his studies show incontestable superiority - from the point of view of independence, self-confidence, social adaptability and intellectual curiosity - proven by children who have attended this institution, which lasts many years after the child has left. The child's social relationships with adults aim at the child's ability to trust and interact with them easily, as well as their ability to recognize their different social roles.

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