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**EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND PROMOTION OF SCHOOL  
SUCCESS: PRELIMINARY DATA OF AN INTERVENTION  
PROGRAMME WITH PARENTS**

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***Abstract***

An intervention with the parents was carried out, which integrates a broader line of research, involving both teachers and students. This consists in the implementation of a programme of promotion of personal and parental skills, during half a year, in which a pre-test is executed followed by the implementation programme and a post-test to compare the results. The instruments used in the two moments of the research included questionnaires to obtain sociodemographic data, the PANAS Scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Emotional Intelligence Scale.

The preliminary action-research study involved 5 parents of pupils from two classes of a school in the centre of Portugal, who showed disruptive behaviours in the 7th year of schooling. The parents showed a very favourable perception regarding their participation in the programme, considering that it helped them perceive some behaviours and practices less adjusted to their performance, for instance at home (shouting, scolding, etc.). From the pre-test to the post-test, there were statistically significant differences in the evaluation of one's own emotions and their use, as well as evidence of an improvement in positive affects and satisfaction with life. Preliminary data on this parental empowerment programme point to the importance of raising awareness about its action, as well as the need to change traditional educational practices that contribute to the demobilization of children in the face of school tasks. The need to establish a closer and more systematic contact with teachers was also highlighted in order to meet their needs and expectations.

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**Keywords:** Parents, 3rd cycle of basic education, emotional competences, well-being.



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## 1. Introduction

Emotionally intelligent people (EI) are defined, in part, as those who control their emotions according to logic, assuming themselves as a consistent model of emotional functioning. EI outlines as one of its premises that emotional responses can logically be consistent or inconsistent, with particular convictions about emotion. Pertaining to pure emotional reactions, such as those instances of happiness or the fear exhibited early in childhood, few cognitions may be involved. In addition, the person can develop models that include patterns of emotional functioning. These emotional reactions and models can be evaluated according to their logical consistency and, therefore, to their intelligence (Ljungholm, 2014). However, Rauthmann and Kolar (2013) state that the theory of EI requires the development of criteria for intelligent emotionalism.

In recent years, emotional intelligence (EI) has become a subject of great interest in scientific and academic circles, as well as in the public and private sector (Akduman, Hatipoğlu & Yüksekbilgili, 2015). This involves the ability to perform an accurate analysis of emotions and the ability to use feelings, emotions, and emotional knowledge to increase thinking, incorporating special expertise to deal with one's own emotions and others' emotions (Ljungholm, 2014).

Although a variety of concepts similar to EI have been proposed over the years, modern interest in EI began with the article by Salovey and Mayer, dated 1989 (Akduman, Hatipoğlu & Yüksekbilgili, 2015). These authors initially defined EI as the subset of social intelligence that includes the ability to manage one's feelings and emotions, allowing the ability to discriminate them, as well as use that information to guide thoughts and actions, giving rise to a conceptual model consistent with EI, which differentiates multiple aspects of emotional skills, such as emotional perception and emotional management (Akduman, Hatipoğlu & Yüksekbilgili, 2015). According to these authors, human beings are distinguished in a certain type of social intelligence that is linked to the knowledge of their own emotions (ability to describe, express or communicate their own feelings), to the control of emotions (retaining emotions, yet without repressing and channelling them according to a timely situation or moment), to the recognition of emotions (sensitivity to non-verbal signals from other people) and to the control of social ties (interpersonal efficacy). EI is therefore the ability to understand the way people feel and react and use that ability to make good judgments in order to avoid or solve problems. Spielberger (2004) suggested three major EI models, namely the Salovey and Mayer Model, which defines EI as the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions to facilitate thinking. It contains four subscales: perceiving emotions, using emotions to simplify thinking, understanding and managing emotions. The Bar-On Model emphasizes the interrelated emotional and social skills, measured by self-report, which consists of five dimensions: intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management and general mood. Also, the Goleman Model that describes the construct as skills and competencies that are controlled by the emotional being. It has five dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and relationship management.

Goleman (2014, p. 54) defines EI as "the ability of the person to motivate himself and to persist despite frustrations; to control impulses and postpone the reward; to regulate his own state of mind and to prevent discouragement from subject to thinking; to feel empathy and feel hope." The same author also points out that EI consists in the ability to identify and express emotions, to understand emotions, to

assimilate emotions in thought, and to regulate positive and negative emotions in oneself and in others. Thus, the concept has a close analogy with the concept of personal intelligences, which encompass Gardner's intra and interpersonal intelligences. It should be noted that EI was first academically defined as a skill by Mayer and Salovey (1990) as a sub form of Social Intelligence that would encompass the ability to monitor one's emotions and feelings as well as those of others, discriminate and use this information to guide thoughts and actions (Woyciekoski & Hutz, 2008).

EI is "the ability to recognize the meaning of emotion and its relationships, and its use as a foundation for reasoning and problem solving" (Mayer et al., 2001, p.234) and divide the construct into four skill branches, known as "the four-branch model" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). "The branches established in this model are: the precision in the perception of emotions; the use of emotions to facilitate thinking, problem solving and creativity; the understanding of emotions; and, finally, the management of emotions, in the sense of promoting personal growth. They perceive this model as a hierarchy contextualized in the personality of each individual, where emotional management, at the very top, creates an "interface" between the cognitive system and the general system of personality" (Cabral, 2011, p. 26). Mayer and Salovey (1997), cited by the same author, explain that EI involves the ability to perceive, evaluate and express emotions; the ability to perceive and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thinking; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to control emotions by promoting emotional and intellectual growth. In sum, it is verified that EI is an intelligence that has been configured as a result of the development, evolution and combination of emotion and intelligence. This assimilation, as well as the foundation of the concept of EI, has conceived the recognition of the non-cognitive psychological aspects that intervene in human behaviour. In this line of reasoning, studies have demonstrated the existence of a significant correlation between the cognitive and emotional aspects in people, being this relation very important to obtain effective results in any area of human activity (Soares, 2016).

In the school context, one of the most important aspects of the current debate about EI involves believing that it can be the target of a learning process with direct repercussions in the various social contexts, namely in education, in the working spectrum and in interpersonal relationships. There is evidence from studies that emphasises EI as a predictor of academic success (Matthews, Zeidner & Roberts, 2002). Nonetheless, being highly academically qualified does not always imply high EI (Flores & Tovar, 2008). Several studies have been carried out to determine the predictive power of EI in academic performance, and there is evidence that, the higher the EI, the higher the academic performance (Mayer et al., 2000). As EI can be taught and learned by all social classes (Matthews et al., 2002), it should be noted that society can be positively upgraded by eliminating deviant behaviour resulting from emotional imbalances.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The main research question of this study is to understand to what extent an intervention programme, intended for training, can contribute to developing personal and relational skills in parents of students attending the 3rd cycle of basic education.

### **3. Research Questions**

What are the sociodemographic variables that characterize the parents of this group? To what extent does an Intervention Programme for the development of Emotional Skills (Desenvolver +) promote parental empowerment in these skills?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Parents' emotional training can be seen as a protective factor for their children and reduces the levels of aggression. Along these lines, by accepting the negative emotions of their children, their negative reactions will be fewer. On the other hand, it is important to mention that parental styles significantly influence children's psychosocial development, namely social adjustment, their psychopathology and school performance (Barreiros & Cruz, 2012). In this context we intend to compare the results of the parents before and after the implementation of the Desenvolver + Programme.

### **5. Research Methods**

A preliminary study was developed using the research-action methodology. It aims to modify a particular situation towards its improvement, as well as to produce knowledge about changes in social reality, with the participation of the actors themselves, trying to overcome the dualism of theory and practice (Noffke, & Somekh, 2010; Cardoso, 2014). In this case, it contemplates the design and implementation of an intervention programme with parents, integrated in the "Desenvolver +" programme, which intends to develop their personal skills (well-being and emotional intelligence) and relational skills.

The study was conducted over a period of six months and included an initial evaluation, pre-test, using a set of tools and the post-test, using the same tools. The initial planning was subject to successive reformulations, based on the reflection and evaluation of the sessions, which the dynamic monitors specialized in Psychology and Health would carry out throughout the implementation phase, in a cyclical process of planning/action/reflection that is characteristic of this methodological approach (Cardoso, 2014).

The convenience sampling involved 5 parents from two 7th grade classes of students who showed disruptive behaviour at a school in the Centre Region of Portugal. The parents who participated in the empirical study are 4 females and 1 male, aged between 34 and 43 years, and are all married. Two parents hold the 6th year of schooling, another two the 9th year and one has the 12th year.

The "Desenvolver +" Programme included 12 sessions (in addition to pre and post-test sessions), on a weekly basis and with a duration of 120 minutes per session. The proposed activities and tasks were diversified and, in the first phase, were directed towards the greater difficulties faced by parents in dealing with problematic children at home. This was carried out in order to raise awareness of the importance of children's perceptions for the effective necessity of school, for the development of communication and expression skills as well as emotional self-regulation, so as to obtain a better emotional and social interaction; in a second phase, activities and tasks focused on the organization of home study and the implementation of effective relational strategies. The methodologies used were

dynamic, participatory, integrated and varied, including thematic debates (emotional management and their relevance in the relational context, parent-child and parent-teacher relationship, study organization methodologies, training for an assertive education ...), case studies, movie viewing, group dynamics, etc.

After the implementation of the programme, we re-applied the same tools. To collect data, a questionnaire was used to obtain sociodemographic data, the PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule), by Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988), in the Portuguese version reduced and adapted by Galinhas and Ribeiro (2005), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), by Dinner (1984), adapted to the Portuguese population by Simões (1992) and the Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, 2002), adapted by Rodrigues, Rebelo and Coelho (2011). Concerning the psychometric qualities of the various scales, the results of internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha, reveal, in general, adequate values.

## 6. Findings

After the twelve sessions of implementing the training programme for the promotion of personal skills (well-being and emotional intelligence) and relational skills, we applied the same tools to verify if there were any differences in the perceptions of parents, in terms of positive and negative affection, satisfaction with life and emotional intelligence. A short session evaluation questionnaire was also applied and there was a focus group at the end of the programme, which was attended by all the participants (students, parents and teachers). With regard to pre-test and post-test results, the data of the positive and negative affect constructs, satisfaction with life and emotional intelligence were considered.

As for the first, we noticed that positive affects were lower in the post-test ( $X=23.8 \pm 4.60$ ) than in the pre-test ( $X=25.6 \pm 9.39$ ), and without statistical significance ( $Z=0.000$ ;  $p=1.000$ ). For the negative affects we have higher pre-test scores ( $X=23.80 \pm 12.94$ ) than in the post test ( $X=16.80 \pm 7.12$ ), but without statistical significance ( $Z= -1.095$ ;  $p=0.273$ ) using Wilcoxon's test. As for the difference in affection, we found that they were higher in the post-test ( $X=6.14 \pm 5.95$ ) than in the pre-test ( $X=1.80 \pm 7.00$ ), with no significance ( $Z=-1.214$ ;  $p=0.225$ ). Life satisfaction improved after the intervention, with a mean of  $18.00 \pm 5.09$  at the first moment and of  $20.60 \pm 2.50$  in a second moment, with a marginal significance ( $Z=-1.214$ ;  $p=0.225$ ).

The perception of intelligence data show that there were improvements in all other factors from the pre-test to the post-test. In the case of Factor 3, "Evaluation of the use of Emotions", the differences found are statistically significant. For Factor 3, the difference of averages found was  $-5.00 \pm 3.19$ , with  $Z=-2.84$  and  $p=0.047$ . In factor 1, "Evaluation of One's Emotions", the mean difference was  $-2.40 \pm 2.54$ , but without statistical significance ( $Z=-0.948$ ;  $p=0.343$ ). In Factor 2, "Evaluation of Others' Emotions", the mean difference was  $-1.00 \pm 2.89$ , but without statistical significance ( $Z=-0.00$ ;  $p=1.00$ ). In Factor 4, "Evaluation of the handling of Emotions", the mean difference was  $-3.20 \pm 2.08$ , but without statistical significance ( $Z=-1.64$ ;  $p=0.10$ ).

Based on the analysis of the final assessment questionnaires, the parents showed a favourable perception regarding their participation in the programme. They all agreed that the proposed objectives were fully met. Regarding the methodology used, they considered that it was very or totally adequate, both at a theoretical level and at a practical level, and that the learning resulting from their participation in the programme will have repercussions on the improvement of their parenting. The participants

considered, in their overwhelming majority, that the contents were adequate and adjusted to the recipients, the language used was very clear and assertive, and the materials made available were useful and appropriate to the work to be developed. In terms of final assessment, the five parents rated the programme as excellent.

During the focus group at the end of the intervention, the parents reiterated their positive appreciation concerning the interest of the intervention programme to improve their parenting skills. They mentioned that they liked the relaxed and informal atmosphere in which the training took place, as well as the participation and discussion that was present throughout the various sessions. Several parents stressed the importance they had for their personal and relational development with their children to intervene around the problem of emotional interaction, a dimension they consider fundamental to work with children who reveal behavioural problems, with a view to creating a positive and empathic atmosphere. Parents highlighted cases of children whose behavioural improvements were evident, some time after the systemic intervention, with the expectation that this training can translate into positive school results. One parent stressed the relevance of the approach to learning new behaviours and the need to change relational practices in order to motivate children to learn, making them more participatory and involved in the activities to be developed in school. All parents felt that the intervention should have started early in the school year in order to have a greater impact on the various actors and to allow them time to make the recommended changes. In addition, there should be more systematic contact between the various actors (students, parents and teachers) and not just a contact at the end of the systemic programme sessions, in order to better understand their needs and expectations.

## **7. Conclusion**

The results obtained point to the positive contribution of the training programme in the promotion of personal skills (well-being and emotional intelligence) and professional skills in the parents of students with disruptive behaviours, at the level of parents' perceptions regarding positive and negative affects, satisfaction with life and emotional intelligence, as well as with the promotion of emotional management skills at home and the improvement of parent-child relationship interaction. The Evaluation Report on Parental Education Interventions, carried out between 2007 and 2010 in Portugal, references a programme entitled "Parental Education", whose objectives were to promote self-knowledge and self-esteem, to develop more effective communication formats in the parents' relationship with their children, the promotion of discussion and training of some strategies to prevent/deal with their children's challenging behaviours and attitudes.

Another programme in the area is the so-called "Activate Yourself in Emotions", aiming at the development of more optimistic attitudes on behalf of parents in their relationship with their children. This programme places the central role of intervention in the parents' emotions, that is, parents are invited to first "look" at themselves and then at their role as a parent. Above all, it aims at social and emotional learning as the process through which the individual develops social and emotional skills, including cognition, emotion and behaviour in the achievement and execution of important tasks in the relationship between parents and children (Tavares, 2015). These learning processes foster, through the use of different emotional, cognitive and interpersonal skills, the achievement of objectives relevant to the

personal development of parents and, inherently, of their children (Costa & Faria, 2013). The benefits of socio-emotional learning, self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, interpersonal skills and responsible decision making (Cacheiro & Martins, 2012), are embodied in more adaptive social behaviours, the decrease of emotional stress, promotion of empathy, obtaining greater emotional skills and positive affections, with the optimization of subjective well-being (Costa & Faria, 2013). The same authors point out that social and emotional learning provides parents with the knowledge they need to identify and manage their emotions, which in practice will translate into a substantial increase in personal and social wellbeing levels, of both parents and children.

The role of emotions in human functioning and in the relationships between parents and children is a topic that has aroused much interest, as Paula (2012, p. 158) points out that "the parents' emotional response to the emotions expressed by their children has important consequences at the level of social and emotional development, psychophysiological regulation, coping, emotional understanding and the quality of friendships that their children establish." According to the same author, parents who ignore their children's school life, neglect or lead an extremely rigorous discipline, and who do not value communication, have lower levels of emotional intelligence. Thus, low levels of emotional intelligence result in less effective responses to problems, which leads to poor adaptive phenomena and poor emotional involvement with children. It is therefore necessary for parents to develop emotional expression with their children, because only then can it be possible to recognize and manage their own emotions. As students with disruptive behaviours are especially susceptible to school disinterest and lack of motivation for studying, parents should use a variety of strategies that promote emotional development, mobilize their participation, and motivate them to want to be in school.

From the analysis of the training intervention, some practical implications for a future intervention with parents in this field are highlighted, namely, the interest in reflecting on what the children think about parents and the relevance of reciprocal perceptions, the importance of promoting effective parent-child interaction, which also involves an adequate management of emotions, as well as the need to rehearse and implement new relational approaches that promote greater well-being.

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