PART 1. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

PART 1

Chapter 1. The first school cycle – a great challenge in the child's life

Chapter 2. Description of emotional intelligence and its components

Chapter 3. The development of emotional intelligence and its importance

Chapter 4. The role of teachers in the development of emotional intelligence

Chapter 5. The systemic perspective upon behavioural and disadaptive problems

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CHAPTER 1
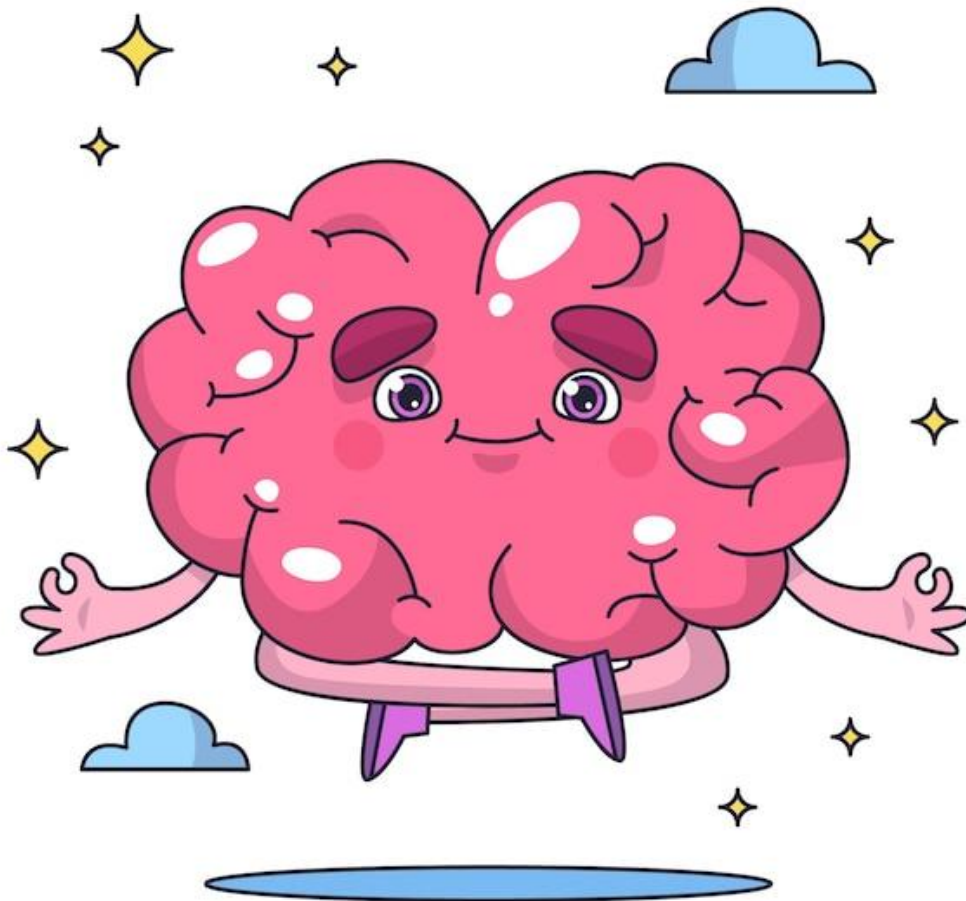
The first school cycle – a great challenge in the child's life

When the child reaches the age of schooling, at around 6 years old, the predominant activity of the pre-school stage, play, gradually begins to be replaced by learning activity and, as a result, in the following years the child undergoes a series of transformations, both anatomical-physiological and psychological that will lead to a huge autonomy leap towards the age of 10 years old.

1.1. Child growth and development throughout the first school cycle

From physical point of view, during this stage the child increases in height with approximately 20 cm and in weight with around 10 kg (Munteanu, 1998). The muscular system is developing faster, triggering a growth in terms of force, precision and speed of the body movement. During this stage the "milk teeth" are replaced gradually by the permanent ones - this fact may draw with itself some periods in which oral language is affected.

On psychological level, mechanical, involuntary and short-term *memory* is predominant at an early school age. Once at school, the child remembers what has made the greatest impression on him or her, which is why memory at this age is highly affective. The process of retaining knowledge is conditioned by the perception of objects and phenomena, so the use of all kinds of teaching materials during lessons is absolutely necessary. The child easily retains even the smallest and most insignificant details, with only 2-3 exposures of the stimulus being sufficient to retain it in memory.

Entering school accelerates the child's process of polishing the *language* by eliminating dialectal elements, slang or poor pronunciation. So the young schoolchild now has access to cultured language in an organised way. The linguistic potential of the schoolchild at the beginning of first grade differs greatly from one individual to another, depending on the education received in the family or the temperament formula. During the primary school period, the child's vocabulary doubles, reaching at the end of the stage about 4000-4500 words, of which a pool of about 1500-1600 units form the pupil's active vocabulary, thus by the end of the early school age, the child is already using the main word pool of the mother tongue. Progress is also evident in oral and written verbal fluency as the pupil approaches the end of this school cycle, around 10-11 years old. The language reaches also a higher quality, more refined and nuanced, while the pronunciation and correctness of the language are heightened by the systematic learning of vocabulary and grammar rules.

It is also the stage in which the basic writing and reading skills are learnt, which takes up quite some effort during the first 2-3 years of the stage. But vocabulary and pronunciation and also fine motor skills benefit from this and get enhanced as well.

The evolution of *thinking* at this age makes it possible to abandon the animistic and naive realist conception of the world in favour of a realist-naturalist conception. Concrete operational thinking now takes hold, facilitating the transition from intuitive, direct knowledge of reality to logical knowledge, based on notions and their relationships. The young schoolchild's thinking acquires an operant character, which means that the individual is now able to manipulate objects and phenomena mentally, while preserving their permanence, without deforming them. Abstract ideas continue to cause difficulties however, because the method used by the child at the age of early schooling is not very rigorous, as he or she uses mainly approximations or successive eliminations. Thus, thinking operations at this age have a concrete character, as the child cannot reason

CHAPTER 1

using only verbal sentences, but needs instead to have access to manipulating the objects, to interact with them or at least with their surrogates – images, sounds, etc.

Intellectual potential makes notable progress, being two or even three times greater at the end of this period than at the beginning. The emergence of the operant character of thought takes both non-specific and specific forms. As the child gets older, he or she increasingly turns to algorithms - a set of rules and instructions for solving a range of problems in different areas. The thinking of the young schoolchild makes use of notions, judgements and reasoning, and the whole register of reasoning gets diversified by reading and by studying sciences. Thus, at this age, notions of number, space, time, causality, necessity, quantity etc. appear. The skills acquired in the area of logical reasoning lead to progress in reversibility. A personal style of thinking is already emerging.

The new intellectual skills acquired during this period fuel a lively intellectual curiosity. The need to know as much as possible about the world around them is evident from the fact that, at this age, children ask many questions, showing an interest in everything that is going on around them, as well as in events, objects or phenomena that are distant - in space or time - from their world. This curiosity needs to be directed and stimulated, in order to lead to a well-built system of notions and general knowledge.

Although children are able to state their correct age at a very early age, on the basis of information provided by their parents, it has been shown that the concept of age is not really understood until the age of 7-10 (Zazzo).

Early school age also provides fertile ground for the development of *imagination*, which will give the child the opportunity to master any time and space. Creative imagination is often practiced in activities like play, drawing, storytelling etc. and it is enhanced by the acquisition of multiple scientific notions and by understanding facts at more profound levels. A new development point is reached when the child is able to make use of the reproductive imagination, which enables him/ her to understand more deeply historical time and the relationships between different events or phenomena. With the help of the reproductive imagination, the young schoolchild can travel back in time, reconstruct facts and events that took place in other times. Incursions of this kind are also often populated with fantastic, fabulous elements, taken from stories and shaped in the spirit of their own fantasies, which evoke not only the fragility of their life experience, but also their remarkable capacity to escape from reality. By the age of 10, thanks to the pool of knowledge acquired, the child is able to order data chronologically and to know and retell historical events in the order in which they took place.

For an optimal development of the imagination process, the child needs appropriate challenges and stimulation through semi-structured tasks and activities, through freedom of decision and through access to a wide range of information.

The child is more attentive to details and the capacity of remaining focused in one activity increases significantly compared with the previous years. Still, children are easily distracted at this age by the richness of the stimuli in their surroundings. Their *voluntary attention* is also linked to the level of motivation they have towards a certain activity or type of information, which leads them to be able to stay focused for hours in certain activities, while being absent-minded during others and thus forgetting the simplest of things - like what is their homework or if they have brushed their teeth.

Entering school also changes the child's *emotional universe*. Their emotional life becomes more balanced. New demands - related to school - diversify the emotional register of the young schoolchild, which is why at this age a sense of duty takes shape. Its development requires, on one hand, direct and tactful adult guidance and, on the other hand, a balanced work schedule. Early schooling also provides fertile ground for the development of moral, intellectual and aesthetic feelings - which must be carefully cultivated both at home and at school.

The strong desire of the school-age child to prove that he is no longer small is often expressed by imitating the behaviour of adults, who will act as role models of social conduct. The children in this life stage are very fine observers of the contradictions between the adults' behaviours and the verbal instructions they preach, thus a high consistency between the two is really important and recommended.

Often at this age, the child resorts to acts of courage - like pretending he/ she didn't feel pain if falling by accident or like entering a dark room to demonstrate he/ she is not afraid – to prove himself/ herself. This may also lead to taking unnecessary risks and getting hurt, so adult supervision and guidance is still very important. The autonomy skills are enhanced and the child is able to take more and more responsibility for himself/ herself – demonstrated by the ability to remain alone at home, to fulfil certain administrative tasks like washing dishes or watering the plants or to be comfortable with going on camps without the company of their parents.

The expression of emotional reactions also changes and the child becomes more censored and discreet during this period. He seems more restrained, more meditative, while regaining the wide range of facial expressions towards the age of 10. Will becomes more powerful during this stage, thus the conscious and voluntary nature of intellectual and emotional behaviour leads to increased performance in activity in general and in school work in particular.

1.2. Appropriate guidance for the child during the first years of school

As mentioned before, going to school comes with new challenges for the child, because if the main activity in the previous period was play, now that needs to change and the main activity for the pupil is studying. This change might require a lot of effort from the child's part and it takes time - usually a year or more - until the child manages to adapt to the new type of effort that needs to be put in. The adaptation process during the first years of schooling is of crucial importance for the whole time which the pupil will spend in school, as it sets the tone for the way he/ she works, learns, takes responsibilities, handles failures or successes etc.

The child should not be alone in this process. The adults in the family and the teachers at school play a huge part in the adaptation process to the new tasks and requirements. Their support and guidance may be decisive in many aspects concerning the children's behaviour during their first school cycle.

The proper support and guidance **at home** includes:

☺ *setting up a comfortable and well lit workspace*, where the young pupil will do homework and will be able to practice writing in a healthy position – having a dedicated space for school work will help the child associate learning effort with that space and, thus, be able to get in a "learning mood" easier and take responsibility for the work while being in that space;

☺ *setting in place a structured, but not rigid schedule*, which allows children to learn, but also to rest and properly get nourished to back up their intellectual and emotional effort – children need structure, as they are not able to take confident decisions regarding their strategies to achieve goals, so the adults should help them put in practice a daily schedule in order for children to be able to monitor what has been done and what is still required of them: enough passive rest (sleeping) time should be accounted for; active rest (play, sports, other hobbies) should also be included, as they are important for the child's well-being; healthy and sufficient meals need to be provided, as the amount of intellectual and emotional effort that the child puts in on a regular basis while adapting to school requirements is tremendous and draining (insufficient or inappropriate nourishment during this period leads to stagnations in growth, attention deficit, immunity problems and decline of the overall well-being);

☺ *stimulating the child's interest for reading and knowledge*, especially through personal examples – when parents or other grown-ups in the family are able to demonstrate a passion for reading and for gathering knowledge, the children will

CHAPTER 1

imitate the model in a high degree and will be able to easily develop these skills;

☺ *celebrating the child's successes* - the school effort is not easy and maintain motivation for it may only be done through acknowledging the strong points and successes of the child;

☺ *encouraging the child's passions* - sometimes parents have a fixed perspective regarding the development needs of the child and that doesn't always suit the real needs, thus, it is very important for the adults in the family to observe the children's interests and provide them with opportunities to further explore those areas;

☺ *setting the base for a strong moral education* - at school children interact with a wide range of other persons, which may behave according to different sets of rules and moral codes, so rather than trying to control what persons does the schoolchild interact with (which is quite impossible), it is better to prepare him/ her for different sorts of situations and for being able to protect himself/ herself from being used or harmed in any way;

☺ *accepting the child for what he/ she is* - all parents wish only the best for their children and often that comes along with a set of expectations regarding what their abilities and competences should be, but sometimes the children's potential might be in a different direction or the road to perfecting certain skills might be a sinuous one, scattered with failures and mistakes, so the love of the parents throughout this bumpy road should always be constant and unconditional no matter if the goals are achieved or not or if they are reached in a different timeframe compared to others.

The appropriate support and guidance **at school** refers to:

❓ *voiding any prejudice and judgemental perspective from the teachers' attitude towards the pupils* - no matter how the pupils present themselves at school, no matter what are the characteristics of their families or of the environments they come from, teachers must stick to their roles of mentors and educators and do their best to inoculate knowledge and ethics, keeping also in mind that pupils are not alike even though often school requires uniformity;

❓ *being mindful of the fact that*, just like in the family, *the teachers are role models* for the youngsters, so *they should mind their behaviour and language, their practice and their way of relating to others* - one will not win over a child by scolding or by criticizing, by raising the voice or by preaching a behaviour one is not willing to implement oneself;

❓ *validating the strong points and achievements of the pupils*, even though they have not reached a standard level - often school curricula provides standardized learning objectives and levels of performance, which are suitable for most pupils within a certain age range, but teachers should also be aware of the differences among pupils and their individualities and make the pupils which not measure up to those standards feel encouraged and included;

❓ *trusting the pupil's potential* - the child does not have the necessary abilities and competences to empower himself/ herself, so he/ she needs a grown-up to believe in his/ her potential and lead the way towards growth and development; teachers are powerful reference persons in a child's life, so their confidence in the child's abilities could make a huge difference;

❓ *setting intermediary achievable goals* in order to guide the school performance and stimulate the child's formative development - breaking the learning process into small tasks and the learning material into smaller units contributes to maintaining the motivation of the child and to make knowledge more "digestible".

Teachers and parents can and should work together for guiding the children through the challenges that this life stage comes with. Home education and school education are not in competition with one another, they are different aspects of the same goal: the good of the child. Thus, both teachers and parents should acknowledge the individuality of the pupils and cooperate in order to help them reach their full potential.

Description of emotional intelligence and its components

CHAPTER 2

Emotional intelligence is a wide spoken concept nowadays and the attention it gets from both scientists and the general public proves its great importance in reaching the human potential. Moreover, by accepting that emotional intelligence is a general ability - as opposed to innate talents - activities and strategies for developing it have emerged in the past decades in the scientific literature.

2.1. Emotional intelligence as a scientific concept – literature review

Emotional intelligence can be defined in a variety of ways, and there are numerous definitions online. Several of these concepts are based on popularizations of emotional intelligence that may be found in popular books and the media. But since it takes the concepts of emotion and intellect seriously, a precise and scientifically valuable definition of emotional intelligence may be identified. In other words, the definition of emotional intelligence specifically refers to the intelligent interaction of concepts and emotions. For instance: The ability to use emotions to support thought and to rationally reason with them is known as emotional intelligence (Mayer, n.d.).

The term "emotional intelligence" was first used by Salovey and Mayer in 1990 and they were aware of earlier research on non-cognitive aspects of intelligence. According to their definition, emotional intelligence is "a sort of social intelligence that entails the ability to monitor one's own and others' moods and emotions, to discriminate between them, and to utilize this information to inform one's thinking and action." (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Moreover, Salovey and Mayer started a study to create reliable emotional intelligence tests and investigate its relevance. For instance, they discovered in one study that viewers who scored well on emotional clarity–the capacity to recognize and categorize an experienced mood–recovered more quickly after watching an unpleasant movie Salovey et al. (1995). According to a different study, people who scored higher on the capacity to effectively sense, comprehend, and judge others' emotions were better able to adapt to changes in their social settings and form supportive social networks (Salovey, n.d.). The outcomes showed that one was able to spread his emotion throughout the group, and that positive emotions enhanced cooperation, fairness, and overall group performance. In fact, quantifiable measurements showed that the happy groups were more adept at allocating the funds fairly and in a way that benefited the business.

Researchers have long recognized that emotional intelligence, and empathy in particular, play a role in professional success. More than 20 years ago, Rosenthal and his Harvard colleagues found that persons who were good at recognizing others' emotions were more successful in both their professional and social lives (Rosenthal, 1979).

Goleman has made an effort to illustrate this concept by differentiating between emotional competence and emotional intelligence. The personal and social abilities that result in greater performance in the workplace are referred to as emotional competence. Emotional intelligence is a foundation for and a relationship between the emotional competencies. Learning the emotional skills requires a certain amount of emotional intelligence, according to the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations (Goleman, 1996). A perfect example of this, is that one can build a certain talent like Influence by being able to precisely identify what another person is feeling. Similar to this, those who are more adept at controlling their emotions will have an easier time growing a competency like initiative or achievement drive. In the end, if we want to be able to anticipate performance, we need to be able to identify and assess these social and emotional competencies (Goleman, 1996).

CHAPTER 2

According to Goleman, emotional intelligence is a perspective that goes beyond the cognitive qualities of intelligence (like memory and problem-solving). We are mostly talking about our ability to successfully communicate with others and with ourselves, to connect with our emotions and manage them, to be self-driven, to control our impulses, and to get over our disappointments. Goleman explains that his theory of emotional intelligence has four fundamental dimensions: The first is awareness of oneself (self-awareness) and it alludes to our capacity to comprehend how we feel, to be in touch with our core principles. The second dimension is self-motivation, which refers to our capacity to focus on our objectives, bounce back from failures, and control stress. The third relates to social consciousness (social awareness). It has to do with our capacity to relate to, communicate with, come to agreements with, and establish positive, respectful connections with people which is unquestionably the fourth link and the philosopher's stone of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996).

Being emotionally intelligent generally entails realizing that feelings are an integral component of who we are and how we live. Being talented emotionally it can make us more flexible, adaptive, and emotionally mature. (Konsep Dan Makna Pembelajaran: Untuk Membantu Memecahkan Problematika Belajar Dan Mengajar / Oleh, H. Syaiful Sagala | OPAC Perpustakaan Nasional RI., n.d.) mentioned that one of the characteristics that teachers need to be aware of in order to assist students with learning issues is intelligence so as to raise student performance. Emotional intelligence skills to work in synergy with cognitive skills, people who are high achievers have both. Uncontrolled emotions can make people good at being stupid. Without emotional intelligence, people will not be able to use their cognitive abilities according to its maximum potential.

One study determines how emotional intelligence–which includes self-awareness, self-management, motivation, social awareness, and relationship management–influences student accomplishment in part and simultaneously. It concluded that the purpose of The Impact of Emotional Intelligence Against Academic Success is to identify how emotional intelligence–which includes self-awareness, self-management, motivation, social awareness, and relationship management–affects academic achievement. 135 pupils from SMP Negeri 4 Lalan Great Earth Village in Banyuasin Regency served as the respondents. Strategies for data analysis using regression analysis, preliminary assay outcomes (t-test) Self-awareness, self-control, motivation, social awareness, relationship management, and a significant favourable impact on academic accomplishment are all examples of emotional intelligence that has been demonstrated. Emotional intelligence includes self-awareness, self-management, motivation, social awareness, relationship management, and has a strong favourable impact on academic accomplishment, according to the results of the Simultaneous Test (Test-F). Social awareness has a stronger impact on academic success (*GUIDENA: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, Psikologi, Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, n.d.).

2.2. The components of emotional intelligence

The most basic definition of emotional intelligence is the capacity to identify and control our own emotions as well as those of others. This definition's four key EI domains are the following:

- **self-awareness** - defined as the capacity of a person to recognize and name his/ her own emotions at any given time by being aware of own thoughts and body cues;
- **self-management** - defined as the capacity of a person to manage the expression of emotions, meaning the behaviours and reactions which are triggered by his/ her emotions, according to the situation they are in;
- **social awareness** - defined as the capacity of a person to identify and name the emotions of other people by the verbal (words), non-verbal (mimics, gestures, posture, behaviours) and para-verbal (characteristics of the voice: tone, volume, inflexions etc.) cues;
- **relationship management** - defined as the capacity of a person to choose a reaction

CHAPTER 2

best suited to the situation they are in and produce the anticipated effects upon other persons, thus influencing the others' feelings, thoughts, behaviours.

Fig. 1. The four components of emotional intelligence are like four differently flavoured slices of the same cake

All of the primary EI theory variations refer to these four domains, though they are known by different names. For instance, the domains of social awareness and relationship management go under what Gardner (1983) defines as interpersonal intelligence, whereas the areas of self-awareness and self-management belong under what Gardner (1983) calls intrapersonal intelligence. Some distinguish between emotional intelligence (EI) and social intelligence (SI), viewing EI as a person's capacity for personal self-management like impulse control and SI as interpersonal competency. The phrase social and emotional learning, or SEL, is used generally to refer to the movement in education that aims to develop curriculum that teach EI abilities.

This domain is known as the Self-awareness stage, according to Goleman (1995), where one is able to identify a feeling as it arises. This idea is regarded as the cornerstone of emotional intelligence. The capacity to recognize and keep track of one's genuine emotions improves self-awareness and one's capacity to keep an eye on and manage one's life. This idea enables an individual to consciously choose both important and unimportant life decisions.

According to (Shapiro, 2010) a child's capacity for verbalizing emotions is a crucial aspect of satisfying basic wants. Gaining emotional control and effective communication both depend on the ability to recognize and express one's emotions. This idea is particularly helpful in creating connections that are loving and satisfying. An awakening of the self is the first step in the idea of understanding oneself. An individual gains the capacity to reflect inwardly on one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour as a result. It is comparable to psychoanalysis when someone employs self-reflection to develop a more accurate picture of who they are. One develops emotional competence of the self by fine-tuning the level of understanding of one's sentiments where conscious and unconscious thought are susceptible to a level of research Goleman (1995). Here is an example of knowing one's emotions: Anna's parents gave her the chance to experience her first concert as a birthday present. Anna finds out two days prior to the performance that the band had to postpone the show due to a member's illness. Anna expresses her displeasure in words and anticipates to the rescheduled event.

The impulses that are sent to the brain directly correlate with the cause and effect of emotions. According to Howard (2006), situations that have the potential to cause emotional reactions must first pass through the mind's and brain's appraisal process. This activity is thought to be a fast response that happens in the interval between the stimulus and the response. As a result, the brain regulates how and when emotions are triggered. A certain feeling is transmitted through the stimuli's impact. Because of this link, a person can control the intensity and duration of a certain feeling. Here's an indication of how to control your emotions: Ted is stuck in traffic on his way home from work because a semi-tractor trailer that has overturned is blocking all lanes of the highway. Ted is troubled by his current circumstance, but he chooses to vent his anger by practicing deep breathing and listening to calming music Gardner (1983).

It's critical to consider other people's feelings and needs as one continues to develop a high level of self-awareness. One's social skills, empathic perspective, and social competence

CHAPTER 2

are all moulded by this sensitivity. According to Gardner (1983), the fundamental trait of interpersonal intelligence is "the ability to recognize and make distinctions among other individuals" in terms of mood, temperament, and motivations. He compares the basic form of interpersonal intelligence to a child's ability to distinguish between and recognize other people's moods. Here is an example of how to identify emotions in others: On the playground, Margaret was playing a game of soccer when she tripped and scraped her knee. Apart for Justin, who watched Margaret from the other side of the playing field, no one else intervened to assist Margaret as the game went on. Justin congratulated Margaret on her try to score a goal as he helped her to her feet and led her to the nurse to get her knee inspected.

The degree to which one builds and maintains relationships is a reflection of how self-aware and socially skilled one is. As a result, developing relationships is seen as a process. We must recognize some demands that are inherent in the process of forming relationships, such as creating, sustaining, and upholding affiliations with varied levels of intimacy. Given the complexity of emotions and how they affect interactions with others, this process may be rather challenging. The likelihood of forming effective relationships improves with exposure to social circumstances (Gardner, 1983). We obtain a sense of equilibrium in our exchange of emotional expressions and social competency by partaking in activities that broaden our viewpoint and improve our socialization abilities. Moreover, relationships can be seen as a state of reciprocity where the giving and receiving of emotions and interactions is a respectful and mutual exchange. According to Hendrick & Hendrick, humans have a wide range of feelings for other individuals. The degree to which we like or detest somebody might sum up such encounters. The idea of interpersonal attraction, or just attraction, can be used to define like and disliking. Understanding relationships requires taking into account topics like interaction and affiliation as essential elements of the person's experiences and associations (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). Here's an example of managing relationships: Judy was made team captain of her football team after five months as the team captain of her school's football team. Some of her teammates think highly of her as an intellectual, creative, and imaginative person. Judy is aware that certain members of her football team disagree with this appointment and have decided not to support the coach's decision. In order to win the confidence, collaboration, and respect of her teammates and give them the chance to express their ideas for the future of the school's football team, Judy has chosen to implement a monthly brown bag lunch series.

Goleman makes the case that emotional intelligence (EI) is a phenomenon distinct from IQ in The Brain and Emotional Intelligence: New Insights by citing studies to back up his claim (IQ). For instance, Goleman outlines a number of traits that contribute to EI, which are fundamentally different from a person's IQ. Creativity, desire, perseverance, motivation, rapport, and empathy are a few of these traits. He cites a number of published research findings that "inform us there are brain regions that govern EI, which distinguishes this collection of human talents from academics (verbal, math, and spatial) intelligence, or IQ," in which he claims that there are brain centres that govern EI (Goleman, 2012).

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CHAPTER 3

Emotional intelligence – a catalyst for overall development

The main goal of the 6-10 years old stage in the length of human existence is for the child to prove oneself that he/ she is able to make it in the world of people (Erikson). At this age, they become more and more competent in using logical reasoning, understanding scientific facts and other matters that are typically taught in school. Also, they become more competitive and they want to do things that other children of the same age can do. When they make the effort to perform a task and succeed, they develop self-confidence. However, if they fail, they tend to feel that they are inferior to others. Here is where the emotional intelligence may prove itself useful, as being emotionally competent may in fact make the difference between self-confident children and the ones that feel incompetent.

3.1. The importance of emotional intelligence for kids

Children in primary school with a high degree of emotional intelligence are:

➢ able to use a more elaborate vocabulary when speaking about what they are going through;

➢ distinguishing the diversity and complexity of emotional expressions and understanding the causality of different emotions;

➢ adapting faster to the new sets of rules and tasks at school;

➢ more autonomous, because they are relying on their own skills and competences to succeed;

➢ dealing with mistakes and failures in a healthy way, that helps them learn from them and grow;

➢ prone to initiate and cultivate functional relationships with their peers.

Most of the times, the difficulties with which a child is confronted during the first school years, including most of the situations in which there appears to be a delayed development of the cognitive abilities, are of emotional nature:

◉ they might feel overwhelmed by the tasks and have no idea how to ask for help,

◉ they might feel shy on social level, so they get left out by the group or even laughed at,

◉ they might have a deeper curiosity for the surrounding environment and not knowing how to deal with it might make them seem distracted and inattentive, while they miss on the more formal lessons and tasks,

◉ they might get blocked by their fear of making mistakes and not take action or they might react in an exaggerate way when making the smallest mistake;

◉ they might withdraw and feel misunderstood because they cannot express what they feel;

◉ they might react in an aggressive way because they cannot understand how they should behave in order to be accepted and fit in.

Children who undergo emotional training from an early age are better equipped to regulate their emotions, communicate effectively and establish healthy relationships with others. They are also more likely to develop empathy and compassion towards others, which can lead to greater social cohesion and reduce the likelihood of conflict and bullying (Epstein, 1998). Ultimately, emotional intelligence is a critical component of overall wellbeing and happiness and early education in this area can lay the foundation for a lifetime of healthy cognitive and emotional development. Emotional intelligence helps children develop a better understanding of their own emotions and how they affect their behavior. This self-awareness can help them make better decisions and build resilience in the face of challenges (Ciarrochi & Mayer, 2013).

Therefore, in order to offer children a great start in the school environment and guide them towards self-confidence, self-efficacy and autonomy, parents and teachers alike need to invest energy in activities meant for

CHAPTER 3

developing the children's emotional intelligence. Teaching them to recognize and regulate their emotions, to communicate about what they feel and to take interest in what others feel has the potential to fix their maladaptive behaviours both at school and at home and to help them feel competent in their own life.

3.2. Methods and techniques for developing emotional intelligence from a young age

Emotional intelligence – just like intelligence and creativity – is in fact a general ability, which everyone possesses in some degree and which may be developed and trained through specific methods and techniques. Because the brain of children is highly oriented towards absorbing information, skills and facts, the sooner we approach the training of emotional intelligence in our lifetime, the better performances we get. Still, that doesn't mean that emotional intelligence cannot be developed during adulthood or at old age – actually it can, but the best way we may benefit from it is to master it before we reach maturity.

Further on, we list some educational goals and methodological approaches that may be applied in order to improve the emotional intelligence of 6-10 years old children:

- **Correct identification of personal emotions**: Children are not always able to name what they feel, because they probably don't have the concepts, but they can be directed to pay attention to the signals of their body and to describe them if they are asked the right questions; starting from this, they may gradually be taught to give names to what they feel; there are plenty of books for children on the market in the recent years on recognizing and naming emotions.

- **Emotional regulation techniques**: Recognizing what one feels inside is not enough for regulating the emotion; while we teach that any emotion is natural and helpful, we also need to teach that some behaviours triggered by certain emotions may harm ourselves or the others, so we need to be able to regulate emotions in order to express them in a functional manner – sofrology (breathing techniques), self-guided imagery, art therapy or drama-therapy techniques may all be utilized to teach children how to manage their own emotions and how to put them to good use.

- **Body language "reading"**: Children are very good at observing body language (non-verbal language) and voice inflexions (para-verbal language), but they are not always aware on how to interpret those, thus doing specific exercises in which they need to observe non-verbal and para-verbal language and to correlate it with verbal language is very important.

- **Practice open and honest communication**: Communication is the fundamental tool humans use to learn and establish relationships, but it is also the perfect mean to regulate personal emotions – as expressing the emotional needs is the first condition for them to be satisfied – and the emotions of others – as the right words may be soothing and bring comfort to any soul.

- **Foster kindness and care**: encouraging kids to care for each other and show kindness to the people around them by involving them in charity or by offering them examples of good conduct is very important for building their abilities to initiate and maintain friendships and for nurturing empathy.

- **Build resilience**: Help pupils understand that setbacks are a natural part of life and teach them to bounce back from disappointments by focusing to the positive side of things instead of the negative ones and by accepting the things they cannot change.

- **Teach tolerance and prevent discrimination**: Teach children that people are different, but that is always a good thing because variety offers multiple opportunities and heterogeneity is an important premises of evolution, teach them to remain curious about one another and to accept their peers as a never-ending source of inspiration and knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

🎭 **Provide a safe and supportive environment:** Create an environment where pupils feel safe to express themselves and where their emotional growth and development are valued.

Further on, primary school children have certain age particularities, which may be exploited in the favour of a more nuanced educational approach - here is how:

◉ They are very curious.
- ➤ Create learning experiences and present curiosities and fun facts that enable them to make associations and learn new concepts and skills.

◉ They are playful and they learn better when they enjoy themselves in the process.
- ➤ Use gamification, role play and fun tasks to teach them concepts and practical skills.

◉ They need a lot of exterior validation, especially from adults.
- ➤ Point out the positive aspects of their work and praise them for their efforts and progress, even when their skills need improvement.

◉ They are (still) quite tactile-oriented and very sensitive to touch and textures.
- ➤ Offer them tactile learning experiences, in which they can create something during the learning process and don't be reluctant to hug them from time to time for emotional comfort.

◉ They're cognitive abilities are concrete-based (they cannot yet operate with abstract concepts).
- ➤ Use lots of examples and concrete analogies to help them understand complex processes.

◉ They learn better by imitation and example.
- ➤ Be a model of behaviour and they will follow rather than explaining complicate social rules.

◉ Their memory is short term-oriented.
- ➤ Don't expect them to remember something you have discussed a month ago; use a lot of repetition and visual aids to help them remember important rules or concepts.

◉ They are highly creative and eager to express their imagination.
- ➤ Let them use their imagination and creativity in the learning process, by challenging them to come up with ideas, create stories, art pieces, role play scenarios etc. which express their lessons learnt or which allow them to practice their skills.

◉ They are very easily disturbed by unpredicted situations that change their routine.
- ➤ Feeling safe is essential for growth and development, so use reassurance for comfort, while teaching them to divide the elements of an undesired situation into 2 categories: (1) elements they can control and (2) those they cannot control and guiding them to stay focused on the things they can control; also, show them that there is "a spoonful of sugar in everything", that any situation has advantages and disadvantages and guide them towards the appreciation of the positive side rather than towards the disappointment of the negative one.

Emotional intelligence may be developed through consistent practice and reinforcement. By using these methods and techniques, adults can support children to develop emotional resilience, empathy and social skills that will help them throughout their lives. Moreover, the key is to make learning about emotional intelligence fun, engaging and practical.

3.3. Assessment of emotional intelligence

Development of emotional intelligence should always start from the current level of ability, thus the starting point of any developmental approach should be a training need analysis.

CHAPTER 3

Assessing emotional intelligence of primary school pupils may be carried on using several methods:

✓ **observational assessments** - teachers or parents can observe children's behaviour in various situations to get a sense of their emotional intelligence; for example, how do they handle unexpected situations, how do they respond to different emotions (their own and others) and how do they communicate their feelings;

✓ **self-assessment** - for the pupils approaching 9-10 years old there are some tools which can be used to help children assess their own emotional intelligence, such as questionnaires or surveys; these tools can help children understand their own emotional strengths and areas for improvement, but they must be used with care as lower results could trigger feelings of shame and inferiority at this age;

✓ **interactive assessments** – there are games and activities which can be used to assess children's emotional intelligence, such as role-playing activities or board games that require emotional intelligence skills, such as empathy or social awareness;

✓ **feedback from others** - teachers, parents or peers can provide feedback to a child on their emotional intelligence, highlighting areas where they excel and areas where they can improve;

✓ **observation of their emotional expression** – look for signs of emotional expression, such as facial expressions, body language and tone of voice. Children who are emotionally intelligent tend to point out quite accurately what they feel and what is the cause of their feeling;

✓ **component assessment** - empathy, emotion regulation, emotion expression are key components of emotional intelligence; observation or assessment of these separate components may provide a better perspective upon the children's general ability of being emotionally intelligent;

✓ **standardized tests** – there are a number of standardized tests which may be used to assess children's emotional intelligence, such as the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory - Youth Version (Bar-OnEQ-i:YV), applicable for children of at least 7 years old.

It is important to note that emotional intelligence is a complex construct which may be difficult to assess accurately with one method, especially at such an early age. Therefore, a combination of methods may be necessary to get a comprehensive picture of a person's emotional intelligence. Additionally, it's important to remember that emotional intelligence is a skill that can be developed and nurtured over time, so providing children with opportunities to practice and develop their emotional intelligence is crucial.

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CHAPTER 4

The role of teachers in the development of children's emotional intelligence

For primary school pupils, teachers become extensions of the family attachment figures and benefit from their full trust and hope. Because of this, teachers become significant sources of influence, often surpassing the parents' authority in some areas. As such, teachers are role models, mentors and guides shaping their pupils' behaviour and personality, including in areas related to emotional intelligence. Also, because of their close relationship at school, teachers' behaviours and demands may trigger certain emotional reactions in relation to the pupils' self-views and capacities, thus becoming self-confidence and self-efficacy architects – a role that must be addressed with care and responsibility.

4.1. Teachers as guides towards the development of emotional intelligence

Throughout Europe pupils spend, on a regular basis, between 4 and 8 hours in school, 5 days a week. That's up to a 3rd of their time. Thus, the role models they have and the people they meet in school undoubtedly leave a mark on their psycho-social development.

Looking deeper, to the influence teachers have upon their pupils' development of their emotional intelligence, we may be able to extract a few different functions that teachers play within this crucial stage of personal growth and development with a distinct contribution on the development of emotional intelligence:

✓ *creating a safe learning environment* – a supportive and empathetic classroom atmosphere allows pupils to express their feelings without fear, fostering emotional awareness and also teachers need to actively moderate conflicts and mediate different situations or even relationships at this stage, as he/ she is the only adult figure the pupils may turn to when they feel bad or when they are not able to handle events by themselves;

✓ *teaching emotional literacy* – educators can explicitly teach emotional vocabulary and recognition, helping young pupils label and understand their emotions by asking questions, using visual materials, put the right words to their feelings' descriptions;

✓ *validating the children's emotions* – children will display a wide range of emotions in the classroom, because that is what they usually do, while teachers are supposed to acknowledge and validate that emotion (no matter what it is or what has triggered it) as natural and useful and to teach children all emotions have a purpose;

✓ *modelling emotion regulation* – teachers can help small pupils to regulate their intense emotions, while also demonstrating how to manage emotions effectively, serving as models that the pupils will imitate;

✓ *encouraging attention to others and social awareness* – at this age, pupils still tend to be a little egocentric and not pay attention to their peer's needs and emotions, especially if they are not verbally communicated, thus teachers should make a goal out of stimulating their pupils to identify subtle para-verbal and non-verbal signals and to use them for identifying the other's emotions; on the same time, teachers should create experiential learning situations to help the pupils reflect on the impact of their own behaviours upon others;

✓ *encouraging empathy* – teachers can promote empathy by encouraging pupils to consider others' perspectives and feelings; they may also provide or create contexts in which to trigger small pupils to use their empathy skill;

✓ *enriching social skills* – teaching interpersonal skills like active listening and constructive communication is an

CHAPTER 4

important objective in any socio-educational environment, as these skills will regulate the pupils' behaviour, will promote healthy interpersonal relationships and prevent conflict escalation, while also ensuring emotional intelligence development;

✓ *fostering self-esteem* - teachers can boost students' self-esteem through positive reinforcement and constructive feedback and in the case of small pupils, teachers should be extra careful with the way they provide feedback, as young children are more sensitive to criticism and their self-views may become easily affected if they feel unvalued.

In essence, teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing emotional intelligence, guiding their pupils in the maze of social interaction through the behaviour model they offer, through the knowledge they teach about the relationships and through the social skills they shape during the educational process.

Furthermore, by implementing emotional intelligence related activities into their everyday lesson plans, teachers might take their role to the next level of performance, in order to help the pupils reach their potential. Let's explore below the benefits that pupils have from such a practice:

➢ **holistic development:** Emotional intelligence is a critical aspect of human development, encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills. By incorporating these components into lessons, educators can help pupils develop into well-rounded individuals who can navigate not only academic challenges but also, the complexities of their personal and social lives.

➢ **improved learning environment:** An emotionally intelligent classroom fosters a positive and inclusive learning environment. When pupils are taught to understand and manage their emotions, they are better equipped to handle stress, conflicts and interpersonal relationships, creating a more harmonious and conductive setting for learning.

➢ **enhance academic performance:** Research suggests a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. Students with strong emotional intelligence skills tend to perform better academically, because they can manage their emotions, focus on tasks and communicate effectively with teachers and peers.

➢ **long-term well-being:** Emotional intelligence is not just relevant in school; it is a lifelong skill that contributes to personal and professional success. Integrating emotional intelligence components prepares pupils for future challenges by equipping them with the tools to handle stress, build healthy relationships and make informed decisions.

➢ **conflict resolution:** emotional intelligence components help pupils manage conflicts and disagreements constructively. They learn to empathize with others, communicate their feelings effectively and work towards resolutions, reducing disruptive behaviour and fostering a more peaceful classroom atmosphere.

➢ **social skills:** emotional intelligence components enhance pupils' social skills, such as active listening, cooperation and collaboration. These skills are not only valuable in school, but also, in further careers and social interactions.

➢ **emotional resilience:** Teaching emotional intelligence helps pupils develop resilience in the face of adversity. They learn to bounce back from setbacks, adapt to changes and maintain a positive outlook, which is essential for both personal and academic growth.

➢ **prevention of bullying and harassment:** emotional intelligence education can contribute to reducing instances of bullying and harassment. Pupils who understand the impact of their actions on others are less likely to engage in negative behaviours, creating a safer and more inclusive school environment.

➢ **self-advocacy:** Pupils with strong emotional intelligence skills are better at advocating for their own needs. They can express their concerns, seek help when necessary and engage more actively in their own educational journey.

➢ **cultivating empathy:** emotional intelligence fosters empathy, which is essential for developing a sense of social

responsibility and compassion for others. This promotes a more caring and compassionate society.

Gathering the educational resources that teachers have at their disposal and focusing them at developing emotional intelligence in a systematic way somehow resembles to how doctors use laser beams to solve a medical problem: a small, but concentrated beam of "emotional light" will produce massive effects in the overall personality and development of the individual.

4.2. Tips and tricks for teachers set on dealing with emotions

Dealing with emotions is a complex process parallel to the educational goals already set by the curriculum and the teachers, that requires a specific set of skills on behalf of the teachers, but once we start using those skills, we realize that they come pretty natural when interacting with other people, as they are part of human functioning relations repertoire.

Here is what teachers can do:

☻ *Offer emotional support:*
- o Be available and receptive when the children need to talk or express their feelings. Teachers should remember that, at this age, pupils still need to rely on an adult in certain situations.
- o Provide physical comfort (e.g. hug, reassuring touch), when appropriate, just as parent would, as teachers are extensions of the attachment figures the children have in their families.

☻ *Active listening:*
- o Pay full attention when the child is speaking.
- o Maintain eye contact and use nonverbal cues to show you are engaged.
- o Avoid interrupting or finishing their sentences.
- o Reflect on what they say before responding.
- o Use conjectures when you observe children struggling with expressing a

certain idea and ask for their validation if you got it right.

☻ *Empathize and validate:*
- o Show empathy by acknowledging their feelings.
- o Validate their emotions by reassuring them that's ok to feel the way they do.

☻ *Use open-ended questions:*
- o Encourage conversation by asking open-ended questions that require more than a simple "yes" or "no" answer (e.g. "Can you tell me more about what's bothering you?").

☻ *Use appropriate language:*
- o Adapt your language and communication style to the children's age and developmental level.
- o Avoid using jargon or complex terms that may confuse them.
- o Small pupils have a concrete way of reasoning, so try to use examples from the things they relate to in order to make a point.

☻ *Respect their pace:*
- o Give the child space and time to open up. Some children may need more time to feel comfortable sharing their emotions. Imposing a more rapid pace, may discourage the children.

☻ *Avoid judgment:*
- o Refrain from passing judgment or criticizing their feelings or reactions.
- o Create a safe and non-judgmental space for them to express themselves.
- o Beware of the critics or harsh judgements from the peers, try to rephrase those if you catch them or counteract them with a validation.
- o Make a goal out of modelling a non-judgemental attitude and an atmosphere of tolerance in the classroom.

☻ *Share your own feelings:*
- o When appropriate, share your own feelings and experiences to demonstrate that it's normal to have emotions and to show vulnerability. Children are prone to learn from examples, but they also tend to idealize their role models up to the point in which some behaviours might seem unachievable to them. Thus, sharing the vulnerabilities might help

CHAPTER 4

them relate better and feel encouraged to work in order to achieve the ability level they desire.

☯ *Use art & play:*
- o Younger children may find it easier to express their emotions through art, drawing or play. Provide opportunities for creative expression.
- o Beware of the self-limitations that might arise in the pupils' self-expression due to the perception that they lack artistic talent. Encourage the free expression and point out that the process is more important than the product.

☯ *Storytelling:*
- o Share stories or books that address emotions and feelings, which can help children understand and talk about their own emotions.
- o Try to avoid explaining the stories and to encourage the pupils to come up with their own interpretations of the message.

☯ *Model emotional expression:*
- o Demonstrate healthy emotional expression by managing your own emotions constructively. Children often learn by observing adults.
- o Small pupils might be very energetic and active and not easily complying to classroom rules and that might become disturbing when we concentrate on our own list of tasks, but remember that their self-control skills are under development and that, although enhancing cognitive skills and teaching content is very important, we should always prioritize taking care of the souls first.

☯ *Avoid over-reacting:*
- o Maintain a calm and composed demeanour, especially when the child is upset. Your calmness can help them feel safe.
- o Over-reacting often adds fuel to the fire and amplifies the negative emotions that everybody is already feeling, while inhibiting the part of the brain responsible for learning.

☯ *Maintain consistency:*

- o Be consistent in your responses and availability, so the child knows they can rely on your support.
- o Remember that a strong relationship is built over time and that children need constant reassuring before they will be able to provide it for themselves.
- o Pay extra attention specifically to the pupils coming from separated families or who have experienced some form of abuse or abandonment, as they often have difficulties trusting other people.

☯ *Respect privacy:*
- o If the children share something personal, respect their privacy and do not share it with others without their permission.
- o But if you feel that pupils may benefit from sharing their situation or if they have broken some rule, encourage them to come forward on their own.

☯ *Follow up:*
- o Check in with the children later to see how they are feeling. This shows that you genuinely care about their emotional well-being.

Sometimes pupils whose emotions teachers should address have behavioural issues of some sort which seems to complicate the interactions between them. Here are some recommendations for teachers in order to guide them in improving such pupils' situations:

➢ *build a positive relationship:* establish a positive and supportive relationship with a child. Show empathy, patience and understanding.

➢ *set clear expectations:* clearly communicate classroom rules and expectations from the beginning of the school year. Be consistent in enforcing these rules and provide regular reminders.

➢ *use positive reinforcement:* recognize and reward good behaviour. Offer praise, stickers or small incentives to reinforce positive actions, in order to motivate students to exhibit desired behaviours.

➢ *provide structure and routine:* children with behavioural issues often benefit from a structured and predictable classroom environment. Maintain a consistent daily schedule with clear transitions and routines.

CHAPTER 4

➢ *offer choices:* give students choices within boundaries (e.g., allow them to choose between two assignments or activities). This can help them feel a sense of autonomy and reduce power struggles.

➢ *implement behaviour plans:* work with the school's special education team or counsellors to develop individualized behaviour plans for students with persistent issues. These plans can include specific strategies for managing and improving behaviour.

➢ *use visual aids:* visual schedules, charts, or reminders can be effective for children with behavioural issues. Visual cues help them understand expectations and manage their behaviour.

➢ *teach self-regulation:* teach students self-regulation techniques (e.g., deep breathing, counting to ten or using "cooling off" space), when they feel overwhelmed or frustrated.

➢ *provide immediate feedback:* address behavioural issues promptly and privately when necessary. Use "I" statements to express your feelings and observations rather than making accusatory statements.

➢ *differentiate instructions:* tailor your teaching methods to accommodate the child's individual needs and learning style. Adjusting the curriculum and providing extra support can reduce frustration and acting out.

➢ *monitor progress:* continuously assess and monitor the child's behaviour and progress. Keep records of incidents and improvements to track changes over time.

➢ *model appropriate behaviour:* demonstrate the behaviours and social skills you expect from the students. Children often learn by observing and imitating adults.

And here are also some ideas on how to approach a child with behavioural issues:

✓ *nonverbal cues:* use nonverbal cues to convey understanding and empathy. Maintain eye contact, use a calm tone of voice, and avoid crossing your arms, which can be perceived as confrontational.

✓ *listen actively:* allow the child to express their feelings and concerns. Listen actively without interrupting or judging. Sometimes, children act out because they feel unheard.

✓ *validate feelings:* acknowledge the child's emotions and feelings, even if you don't agree with their behaviour. Validating their emotions can help them feel understood and less defensive.

✓ *use positive language:* frame instructions and feedback positively: e.g., instead of saying "Stop running in the hallway", say "Please, walk in the hallway".

✓ *set clear boundaries:* reinforce classroom rules and expectations consistently. Be clear about the consequences of certain behaviours while emphasizing that you believe in their ability to make better choices.

✓ *reinforce positive behaviour:* recognize and praise the child when they exhibit positive behaviour. Reinforcement can motivate them to continue making good choices.

✓ *provide emotional support:* offer comfort and reassurance when the child is upset. Sometimes, a brief break or a few moments of emotional support can help them regain control.

✓ *individualized approach:* recognize that each child is unique and what works for one may not work for another. Tailor your approach to the child's specific needs and changes.

Teachers may choose from so many different styles of teaching and so many different contents, so many methods and so many resources that they may use, but there is one thing which should remain a constant for every person who choses this position: *the care* for the frail, yet full of potential young persons sitting in front of them and absorbing their every word.

The systemic perspective upon

CHAPTER 5

behavioural and disadaptive problems

Human beings are developing a relation with their own physical and social environment ever since they come into this world. They are living in social systems – family, groups of friends, community – which they may get to influence, but that also leave an imprint upon their social behaviour and on their psychological development as well. Their psychological functioning is an inner system, as well, as all the processes and functions are interconnected. This chapter tackles the systemic perspective upon the psycho-social development of the individual and will attempt to explain how the behavioural and dis-adaptive problems are not actually individual, but social.

5.1. The systemic principles and the general theory of systems

The *system* is an abstract totality in which the whole means more than the sum of all its parts, because these parts interact with one another. Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968, 1969) was the first biologist who pointed out that living organisms' growth over time may be regarded as systemic and summarized the systemic principles:

As stated by Bertalanffy (1969), the characteristics of the system are:

◉ *non-summativity totality* – the whole represents more than the sum of all its parts;
◉ *open system/ closed system* – the exchanges with the exterior environment are accepted, but filtered in order to maintain integrity and identity;
◉ *homeostasis* – the balance between two tendencies of a system: changing and maintaining of a status quo; this expresses the natural tendency of a system to maintain coherence, stability, security and balance in the physical and social environment;
◉ *equifinality (unpredictability principle)* – in an open system any given state can be reached by many potential means; two different intermediary states can lead to the same final state, this is why in an open system the actual state does not allow us nor to deduct its history, nor to predict its future;
◉ *adjustment mechanisms* – in order to maintain homeostasis, a system may use:
  • *linear adjustment* – in which an event A determines an event B, meaning that A influences B and B has no influence upon A; according to this mechanism, human behaviours can be explained through past experiences;
  • *circular adjustment* – events A, B and C influence the event D, which in return will influence events A, B, and C, resulting a circular relationship, without beginning and end in which A, B, C, D, influence each other; according to this mechanism human behaviours can be explained through direct observation of relational exchanges;
◉ *tendency towards growth, development, change* – in any functional system there will appear several modifications to which the system needs to adapt; the incapacity to adapt to change indicates a rigid and dysfunctional system;
◉ *hierarchic organization* – any system is hierarchically organized, having several subsystems; within the family we can identify the parental subsystem (parents), the couple subsystem (the couple relationship is different than the parents relationship), the fraternal subsystem (children), considering the hierarchy between the parents and the children.

5.2. The family as a system

The family members have established interactional patterns and the family is a lot more than the sum of its own members. Thus, any family is a system consisting of its members and all the relational patterns among

CHAPTER 5

those and having all the general characteristics of the systems.

The individual experience and behaviour take place within the context of an interpersonal system, in which the family represents the most basic and powerful system. Everything one thinks, feels or does is related to this system (Parsons, 1951).

Every behaviour, no matter how irrational it may seem when viewed from outside the system, makes sense in a certain context and the analysis of every problematic behaviour may reveal a certain function of the symptom. The symptomatic behaviours often arise at moments when it becomes necessary to adapt or change rules that have been in force until that point and are no longer adequate or useful for the system: such moments may be represented by the birth of a child, a child starting school or reaching adolescence, the separation or the divorce of the parents, the departure or disappearance of one member of the family etc., in which the homeostasis of the family is shaken and the rules and the relationships between the members of the family must be re-defined. In this context, every "bad" behaviour has a "good" reason, meaning every symptom has a function of protecting the family system from undergoing any dangerous change and in spite the pain it may cause, it brings benefits for each member of the family. The dysfunctional behaviour thus represents the best solution that the family has come up with to ensure its survival (Dău-Gașpar, Muranyi, Zamoșteanu, 2018).

5.3. The school as a system

Not seldom happens that the school is compared with a family and that is because the rules that govern the dynamics of the two are very similar. In a school class, for example, each student takes on a certain role – the rebel, the geek, the teacher's pet, the buffoon etc. – that seem to fulfil his/ her emotional and social needs through various mechanisms that he/ she has learnt in his/ her own family and behaves accordingly. If the role one plays meets another complementary role, the two persons acting them will start a certain relational dynamic that will abide by the systemic principles. Further on, that might

consecutively draw around other people, thus creating a wider system. For instance, if one student acts as a rebel, another one, possibly the teacher, might act as "tamer", trying to control the rebel's behaviour, but if the method of putting down the rebellion fails, other students might like the power that the rebel seems to have and will join in, thus forming a rebellious group. Other students will cease the opportunity to ally with the teacher and become teacher's pets, snitches or the heroes trying to save the day (Dău-Gașpar, Muranyi, Zamoșteanu, 2018). Gradually the dynamic settles in and starts to define that school group or class.

If we zoom out from the school group, we realize that in fact the school group is a subsystem in the system of a whole school. If we are to identify some of the components of the school regarded as a system, we might name: the management, the administrative staff, the teachers, the students, the nurses, the counsellors etc. All these components are related to one another and every single change of either one of them will eventually affect the whole system. For instance, if the secretary is not present for a week, not just the activity of the administrative and management staff will be perturbed, as they might get stuck or overloaded, but also that of the students and of the teachers, who might miss some information or get asked to work supplementary time to complete databases or such.

And if we zoom out even more, we will be able to see how any school becomes a subsystem in the educational system of a country or a certain geographical area. The systemic principles apply to each level, even though the components might be different. The dysfunctional links between some components will reflect upon all the others (Jones 2015).

5.4. Systemic thinking

Systemic thinking refers to the ability to see the relations between the elements of a system, to be able to look beyond the facts and understand situations in relation with the context that they happened in, to identify rules and patterns that are not explicit and only have

CHAPTER 5

meaning when viewed through the lens of interconnectedness.

Each individual represents an element within one or several systems and interacts with other elements of the same systems - in this respect any new interaction with an element from a different system creates a new system and if these systems are included in others we can refer to them as *subsystems*. In practice, the whole community is a big system, in which there are included family systems, support systems (friends, neighbours etc.), professional systems and each small system could be divided into several subsystems (couple's subsystem, parents' subsystem, children's subsystem, organizational departments' subsystems, project team subsystems etc.) (Minuchin et al., 2015).

The attributes that help identify each element are its behaviours and the behaviours are triggered by the contexts, not just by one context but several at the same time. As one can see in the picture (fig. 1.), one individual taken in any moment in time can be influenced by several layers of systems and subsystems and all these influences will be reflected in a simple, almost instinctive, gesture. For instance, if one child destroys a toy in kinder-garden, that is not just because he was in the mood to do that and systemic thinkers should be able to see a bigger picture in order to understand the motivation. If we look at the immediate context of the behaviour, we might find out that the little boy got frustrated because the toy he was playing with was taken by a little girl, a girl that he was really fond of. He was taught in the family that he should protest if other people make things that annoy him, so he would have liked to protest somehow, but he was also taught by his teacher that it is a bad thing to heart the people we love, so he won't discharge upon the girl. On the other hand he might also feel the pressure of the peer group that might make fun of him because he let a girl take away the toy, so he wants to look strong and offer a power statement. He also knows that running away or leaving the room is a sign of weakness, because he heard his grandmother say that "while rabbits run away, wolfs stay and fight" and he also experienced some fear when he overheard the policeman say to his dad about their neighbour, who destroyed

some things in anger, that for some juridical reason there is nothing he can do about it. All of these thoughts and emotions have thus conducted him towards an only logical behaviour: protect the girl, but protest and show his power, while staying invincible like the neighbour, through destroying the toy. Of course, there would have been different options to react, but in the little boy's mind that reaction might have been the one that made the most sense (Weist et al., 2017).

Along with the basic principles of the systems, the systemic thinking presumes a good use of certain concepts and terms that appear in a recurrent way in the systemic-dialectical approach (Lipman, 1995):

- ✓ *integrality* - refers to the interdependency and inter-relations of the members' behaviours within a system;
- ✓ *feedback* - represents the answers or reactions given by the system, most of the times through amplifying or diminishing certain patterns of interaction, as a result of the pressures or stimuli from the outside or from within the system;
- ✓ *equifinality* - the same results in terms of behaviours or emotions can be obtained through various ways or starting from different triggers;
- ✓ *circularity* or *circular interactions* - exchanges in a system have a circular nature, because each behaviour is a reaction to another person's actions (the so-called triggers) and most of the times the initial behaviour of the whole circuit remains hidden in the past of the system;
- ✓ *hierarchy* - the manner in which power is distributed among the members and the subsystems of the family;
- ✓ *complementarity* - the behaviours and the roles that individuals has within a system are complementary with the behaviours and the roles that other members of the same system have; if one member of the system is low-functioning, another could become hyper-functioning.
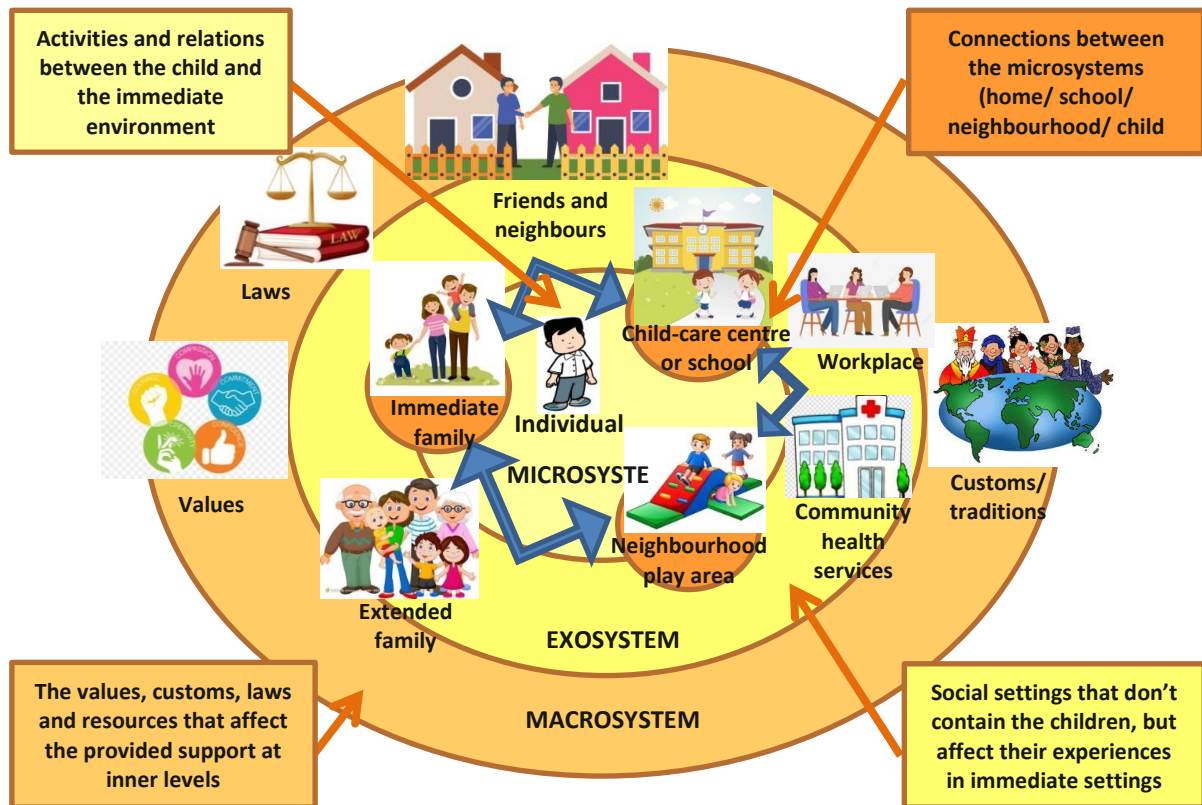
Fig. 2. Structure of systems and subsystems in the social environment

Any professional who uses the systemic lens in order to look at the behaviours of other people or, even children, should be able to extract a pattern from observing the interactions of that person in repeated circumstances and understand how the behaviours are linked to one another in the circular dynamic, how the power is distributed and in what manner are the members of the system trying to re-establish balance.

Teachers and educators of all sorts are invited to measure up to task of seeing the children or the pupils, whose education they are trying to guide, beyond their dis-adaptive and non-conformist behaviours and refrain from labelling them as "bad or undisciplined", as these behaviours are just attempts of adaptation to a dysfunctional environment and pupils are not to blame for their behaviours, but they need to be supported to find new and more functional ways of coping to the social and emotional challenges they are faced with. The systemic lens will guide teachers and pupils with dis-adaptive behaviours towards a more secure path to an effective educational process.
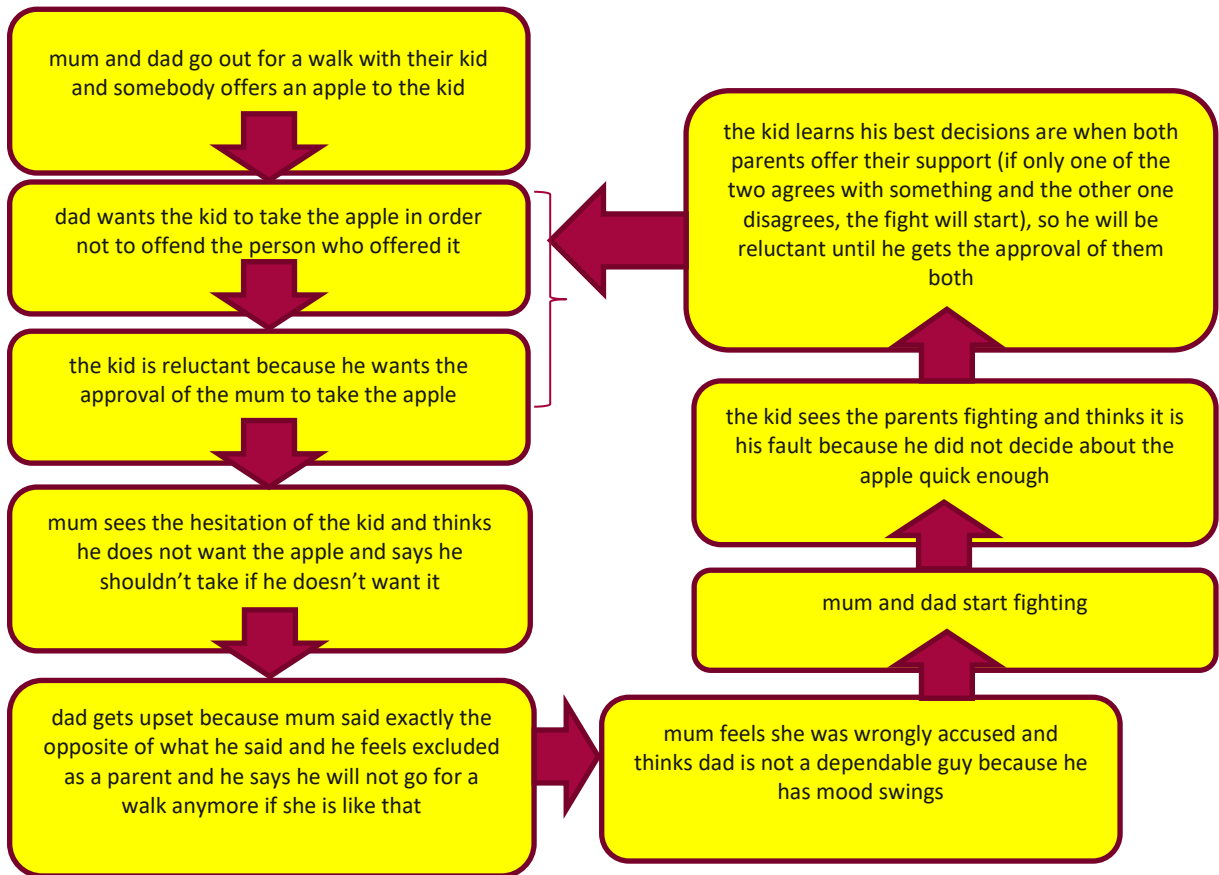
CHAPTER 5

PART 1

CHAPTER 5

mum and dad go out for a walk with their kid and somebody offers an apple to the kid

↓

dad wants the kid to take the apple in order not to offend the person who offered it

↓

the kid is reluctant because he wants the approval of the mum to take the apple

↓

mum sees the hesitation of the kid and thinks he does not want the apple and says he shouldn't take if he doesn't want it

↓

dad gets upset because mum said exactly the opposite of what he said and he feels excluded as a parent and he says he will not go for a walk anymore if she is like that

→

mum feels she was wrongly accused and thinks dad is not a dependable guy because he has mood swings

↑

mum and dad start fighting

↑

the kid sees the parents fighting and thinks it is his fault because he did not decide about the apple quick enough

↑

the kid learns his best decisions are when both parents offer their support (if only one of the two agrees with something and the other one disagrees, the fight will start), so he will be reluctant until he gets the approval of them both

←

Fig. 3. Example of circularity in the family

5.5. How to apply the systemic lens

In order to be able to apply the systemic lens, here are some quick questions teachers and educators might ask themselves next time they witness a dysfunctional behaviour at school, at home or in the street:

➢ What is the vulnerability of that child/ student/ person? What is the emotional need that he/ she might have?

➢ What problem is he/ she trying to solve? What is the function of the disruptive behaviour? What does the child/ pupil/ person achieve by that behaviour?

➢ What can I do to make that child/ pupil/ person feel better about himself/ herself? If it was me in his/ her shoes, what would I need to feel safe and loved?

➢ How can I help the child/ pupil/ person to satisfy his/ her emotional needs in a different way? What alternative behaviours are there that he/ she is not seeing?

The rule of the thumb in all these chains of complicated - and sometimes dis-adaptive - behaviours is that all human beings need somebody to appreciate their qualities, to make them feel respected and important and safe and loved for who they really are. So, if the occasion of labelling a behaviour as being bad or a labelling a child as being maladapted arises, let's try to look beyond it, at the vulnerable child who is "hungry" for love and just give him/ her that.

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