

EMOTIONAL REGULATION AT A PUBLIC EDUCATION SCHOOL: AN EXPERIMENT REPORT

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ABSTRACT

This article describes an experience conducted in a public school, in which emotional regulation work was promoted for children. Over a period of five meetings, a variety of engaging dynamics were employed to facilitate the process of identifying, naming, and effectively managing fundamental emotions, including joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. Based on the evaluation of the group coordinators, the results consistently point to the theory of the substantial benefits of adaptive emotional regulation for healthy child development. It is also worth noting that the emotional experiences shared by children with their caregivers play a crucial role in influencing children's emotional regulation. It was observed that the emotional regulation techniques used by caregivers can be absorbed and internalized by children, exerting a significant impact on the development of their own skills in this area.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; child psychology; educational psychology

Regulación emocional en una escuela pública: un relato de experiencia

RESUMEN

El presente artículo describe una experiencia realizada en una escuela pública, en la que se promovió un trabajo de regulación emocional dirigido a los niños. A lo largo de cinco sesiones, se emplearon diversas dinámicas participativas con el fin de facilitar el proceso de identificación, denominación y gestión eficaz de las emociones fundamentales, entre las que se incluyen la alegría, la tristeza, la ira, el miedo y el asco. Según la evaluación de las coordinadoras del grupo, los resultados apuntan de manera consistente con la teoría a los beneficios sustanciales de la regulación emocional adaptativa para el desarrollo saludable de los niños. Cabe destacar, además, que las experiencias emocionales compartidas por los niños con sus cuidadores desempeñan un papel crucial en la influencia de la regulación emocional infantil. Se observó que las técnicas de regulación emocional utilizadas por los cuidadores pueden ser absorbidas e internalizadas por los niños, lo que tiene un impacto significativo en el desarrollo de sus propias habilidades en esta área.

Palabras clave: inteligencia emocional; psicología infantil; psicología educativa

Regulação emocional em uma escola pública: um relato de experiência

RESUMO

O presente artigo descreve uma experiência realizada em uma escola pública, na qual foi promovido um trabalho de regulação emocional direcionado para crianças. Ao longo de um período de cinco encontros, uma variedade de dinâmicas envolventes foi empregada com o intuito de facilitar o processo de identificação, nomeação e manejo eficaz das emoções fundamentais, abrangendo a alegria, tristeza, raiva, medo e nojo. Com base na avaliação das coordenadoras do grupo, os resultados apontam de forma consistente com a teoria para os benefícios substanciais da regulação emocional adaptativa para o desenvolvimento saudável em crianças. Vale ressaltar, adicionalmente, que as vivências emocionais compartilhadas pelas crianças com seus cuidadores desempenham um papel crucial na influência da regulação emocional infantil. Observou-se que as técnicas de regulação emocional utilizadas pelos cuidadores podem ser absorvidas e internalizadas pelas crianças, exercendo um impacto significativo no desenvolvimento de suas próprias habilidades nessa área.

Palavras-chave: inteligência emocional; psicologia da criança; psicologia educacional

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INTRODUCTION

Feelings can be described as mental representations of the inner state of a conscious individual's body (Júnior, 2021). Their emergence is the result of complex cognitive processes, in which information content is interpreted and gain personal meaning. To Mesquita, Batista and Silva (2019), feelings and emotions are not synonymous. Feelings have a more stable, long-lasting Character, whereas emotions are more circumstantial and transitory.

Although emoticons are a theme of great importance for psychology, there is still no consensus regarding its definition (Izard, 2006). Thus, the definition that will be used in this article comes from the study by Mesquita, Batista and Silva (2019), which defines emotion as an organism's reaction and assessment of environmental stimuli, including inner and outer sensations.

From this perspective, it is possible to say that emotional regulation plays a critical role in one's social interaction capacity and directly influences behavior patterns and emotional expressions (Mocaiber et al., 2008). Thus, while emotional deregulation is an inability to handle experiences and process emotions caused by such experiences, emotional regulation is the way individuals manage to handle their emotions (Leahy, Tirsch, & Napolitano, 2013).

In other words, emotional regulation can use adaptative and non-adaptative confrontation strategies. In this case, adaptative regulation refers to confrontation strategies that, in a productive way, promote the recognition and the processing of reactions in the short and long terms, in conformity with the objectives, goals, and qualities that are appreciated by individuals. Non-adaptative strategies might temporarily reduce the intensity of emotion, but they are harmful and disagree with the purposes individuals would normally adopt (Leahy, Tirsch, & Napolitano, 2013).

Davis, Levine, Lenche and Quas (2010) affirm that regulating emotions is one the most important things to learn in childhood. Initially, children's regulation is external, by means of caretakers, and then it progressively evolves into internal regulation – that is, self-mediated (Soufre, 1995). Thus, promoting the creation of the necessary tools for adaptative emotional regulation is essential for children to be able to develop healthy confrontations strategies.

These considerations led to the intervention on which the present article is based. The objective of this study, therefore, is to describe the experience of a workshop that was realized at a public school in order to promote emotional regulation among children. Thus, the present report aims to show the interventions that were realized and their results as the basis for future research and actions to promote childhood mental health.

METHOD

The realized experiment was created in an extension

discipline named "Psychology in Educational Processes" in a course at a university in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul. Five meetings and five workshops were realized at another public school in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul. The actions took place between May and June of 2023 and included three psychology students, workshop coordinators and also help and guidance by a psychology doctor professor.

The afternoon meetings had the duration of 45 minutes with a weekly frequency. The school at which the meetings were realized is a Basic Education Municipal school which offers special education and basic education between kindergarten and the ninth year of basic education. The school is publicly administrated and offers classes in the morning and afternoon and it already receives psychology interns.

All practices that were developed by the students were weekly checked by the responsible professor in person. In addition, since the participants are underage, the school received and signed a participation term containing a detailed explanation of the activities as well the organizers' contact info. The activity was approved and the term was signed by the school's vice-principal. Thus, the participants' personal information is protected by the Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados (LGPD), or General Law of Data Protection (Superior Tribunal de Justiça [STJ], or Superior Court of Justice, 2020). Likewise, the developed practice respected all articles of the Código de Ética Profissional do Psicólogo, or Psychologists' Professional Ethics Code (Conselho Federal de Psicologia [CFP], or Federal Psychology Council, 2005).

Participants

The participants were selected by simple inclusion criteria: they were supposed to be students of the fourth year of basic education at the public school where the intervention was going to take place, they were supposed to be between 8 and 11 years old, they were supposed to be available in the afternoon, and they had to voluntarily agree to participate in the project. The criteria were listed in a more comprehensive way in order to include the largest possible number of participants without the interference of the group coordinators, resulting in the acquisition of a more diverse sample.

Thus, it was possible to count on the average participation of 23 students, aged between 9 and 10 years. The total number of participants varied in each meeting, and depended on the presence of individuals at school. Nonetheless, all 23 participants attended at least one of the meetings. In addition, the utmost number of absences that were reported in one day was only three.

Tools and Interventions

Four workshops were realized during the meetings. However, the present article will be about two of them: the Emotional Identification Workshop and the Anger Volcano Workshop or Conclusion. These names were

produced by means of a summary of the activities in order to excite and engage the participants' curiosity.

The Emotional Identification Workshop was based on the introduction proposal of all participants and of the beginning of development of identification of primary emotions. The proposed activity was the thread ball for introductions, in which the participants provided information regarding their names, ages, and one thing they like doing as well as one thing they do not enjoy doing. After that, it was possible to observe that participants have similar tastes and distastes and, therefore are interconnected – by the web created by the thread ball and by their personal tastes. Later, the coordinators asked the group how they feel about doing the things they like doing and the things they do not like doing. This question was useful to introduce and explain primary emotions, with the help of the characters in the movie "Inside Out" (Rivera & Docter, 2015) to make the activity more fun.

The Anger Volcano Workshop was the conclusion of the meetings. The anger-volcano metaphor was used (Stallard, 2004), by handing out a printed image of a volcano to each participant. On the whiteboard, there was a drawing of a volcano with different "levels". There was emphasis on the cumulative effect of the volcano, filling up with lava until it had no more control and explodes, exterminating life around it. Likewise, anger accumulates inside people and, if nothing is done to deal with it, someone might "explode" and offend a friend who was unaware of what was going on. The children were asked to select their level of anger on the volcano. After that, the participants were encouraged to speak about they can tell when their volcano was about to blow up, and what they could do to prevent it from happening. Finally, relaxing techniques were recommended – such as diaphragm breathing and the passive relaxing technique (Vera & Villa, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education is means to construct knowledge and put them into execution and it is also a multifaceted phenomenon that is externalized on the streets, houses, churches, and above all, at schools (Freire, 2003). There are many conceptions and practices to understand education. However, health and emotional education deserve special emphasis. The first one aims to capacitate individuals to make autonomous decisions regarding their mental health (Mallmann et al., 2015), while the second one promotes the knowledge and the skills to handle emotions. That is the reason why we can emphasize the importance of providing emotional education at schools (Costa, 2017).

In this sense, educating children emotionally means teaching them to validate their emotions, to demonstrate empathy, identifying and naming feelings, establishing limits, practicing self-acceptance and respect for

others, and conflict-solving strategies (Arruda, 2015). Although emotional regulation is limited in the first childhood, children acquire skills to handle emotional and social complexities. Thus, emotional development is a continuous process that goes from childhood into adult life.

The primary emotions that children can identify are joy, anger, sadness, and fear. According to the children's evolution, they will develop more complex emotions such as shyness, surprise, euphoria, shame, pride and empathy. However, children and young people at school age need to learn inner workings and the best way to handle their emotions regarding situations in their lives (Franco & Santos, 2015). Thus, it was possible to approach the different steps of emotional regulation: naming, identification and confronting strategies with the students. Based on that, workshops and engaging activities that included emotional regulation were used in accordance with the ages of the students.

The first workshop, regarded as an introduction to emoticons, aimed to identify the different types of emotions – such as anger, sadness, disgust, and fear. In addition, for the last meeting, participants worked specifically on anger and on how to handle it. Mindfulness practices were used as a method to obtain emotional self-regulation. The objective was to help students to develop healthier techniques.

Initially, the participants commented on their ways to calm themselves down when they were angry. They mentioned brawling, spanking and screaming. Thus, the objective was to replace these reactions with the application of self-regulation techniques, such as body scanning, attention on breathing – including diaphragm breathing – conscious acceptance, and so on.

Throughout the workshops, the students reported experiences from their everyday lives as examples for every assessed emotion. In addition, at the moments where the different way to experience emotions were explored, some participants reflected on their feelings while indicating the parts of their bodies they felt the different sensations.

Finally, several students mentioned the reactions of their parents as examples of how to handle emotions. Especially, when working with the anger theme, the children shared personal experiences with their caretakers, mentioning their parents' techniques as ways to express feelings and even mirroring their actions. For example, students mentioned reactions like screaming and spanking when feeling angry – expressions that they reported observing in their parents with frequency. By reflecting on these aspects, some students even mentioned that they believed that some forms of emotional regulation seemed positive because their parents used them. Such fact is also in accordance with Soufre (1995), who affirms that behaviors of acquiescence and responsiveness in the caretakers

might play an important role in the children's capacity of emotional elaboration.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The elaboration of this experiment report, led to an intervention that was realized at a public school for children's emotional regulation. Based on the workshops, it was possible to observe diverse practical pieces of evidence regarding the major theories of emotional regulation. One of the most important observations is that childhood emotional regulation strongly depends on the children's experiences with their caretakers and on the mirroring of confronting strategies of their guardians.

In this experience report, it was possible to explore the intersection between school psychology and the practice of group interventions, while revealing the importance of school psychologists as professionals who play a fundamental role in the promotion of wellbeing in the development of the children. By conducting a small number of meetings with the participants, it was possible to observe that, even in a short period of time, a series of significant benefits were observed. The children who were the target of these interventions presented improvements in their socio-emotional skills and conflict resolution, indicating the efficacy of the adopted strategies. This experience reinforces the importance of school psychology as a field of practice that is capable of creating positive impacts on educational contexts, even in brief interventions, while highlighting the transforming potential of this approach for the mental and emotional health of the children.

Finally, all observations that are present in this report seem to be in accordance with the most important theories of Emotional regulation, but some limitations were also observed. Since the practice was realized in a few meetings, there is difficulty to better explore the results of the interventions. Thus, we can suggest the development of new studies regarding emotional regulation with children in the school environment. Thus, the present report can be the basis for future research and actions for the promotion of mental health in childhood, based on a longer development of the exposed interventions that were demonstrated in this study.

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