

EMOTIONAL REGULATION SKILLS IN THE PEDAGOGICAL PROCESS

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Abstract. The article explores models of emotional regulation in the context of their application in a pedagogical environment. It focuses on effectively introducing appropriate approaches to emotional awareness and reflection as an essential component of the learning process. Emotional regulation skills play a crucial role in children's overall well-being and successful adaptation within the educational environment. This paper presents a theoretical analysis of emotional regulation as a key component of educational well-being, with a specific focus on children from primary school age. Based on established psychological models, the study proposes a structured pedagogical framework for fostering emotional awareness and self-regulation in a learning environment. The article presents a conceptual synthesis complemented by a pedagogical model applicable in primary education, aiming to support teachers in creating emotionally supportive learning environments.

Keywords: emotional regulation; pedagogical process; models of emotional regulation

Introduction

The present article focuses specifically on emotional regulation in primary school children, considering age-related differences in emotional awareness, self-control, and pedagogical context. The theoretical perspectives discussed, serve as an analytical foundation for understanding emotional regulation as a dynamic and learnable process, which can be intentionally fostered within pedagogical settings.

Emotional regulation includes an individual's ability to manage attention, affect, and behavior to meet goals (Thompson, 2019, pp. 805 – 815). Emotional regulation directly affects child development, health, and well-being, and sets the path for an individual to manage health behaviors and meet their full social and economic potential across their lifespan (Adynski et al., 2024, pp. 201 – 211).

The process of emotional regulation has its specific features and is of great importance for achieving a state of well-being and life satisfaction. One broad definition of wellbeing is as follows: "wellbeing can be understood as how

people feel and how they function both on a personal and social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole” (Jarden & Roache, 2023). Well-being can be referred to as the way people deal with their everyday lives (Wong, 2011, pp. 69 – 81). Well-being is an important predictor, for it reflects not only healthy functioning and happiness (Ryan & Huta, 2009, pp. 202 – 204), but also serves an evaluative function in the self-determination process (Ryan & Huta, 2008, pp. 139 – 170).

What suggests in-depth studies is the need to determine the factors that have a positive impact on achieving harmony in feelings. The challenge lies in the fact that this process is not measured solely by the predominance of positive emotions over negative ones, but by the ability to balance the need and correlation between different emotions and the intensity of their perception. Nowadays, it is crucial to navigate emotional awareness to form a healthy lifestyle and lifelong learning skills. The latest research shows that children who are capable of managing their emotions tend to participate in school tasks, feel happier in their social environment, and have better motivation to study.

One of the key goals of education process for children of primary school age is to develop children’s ability to understand emotions. This can be fostered through three main approaches: (1) providing a rich communicative environment that broadens children’s emotional experiences; (2) organizing diverse activities that help children recognize and comprehend different emotions; and (3) offering appropriate guidance for emotional expression to support children’s healthy emotional development (Yuhang, 2019, pp. 34 – 40). As people develop, their ability for emotional responses (including “coping” behavior) increases dramatically (Barrett, 1998, p. 115). The development of children’s emotional life evolves in interactions between their experiences and relationships. The emotional environment of children of primary school age appears to be very important in the way the child’s emotionality regulates his or her interpersonal and intrapsychic functioning and how the child learns to regulate emotion (Cole et al., 1994, pp. 73 – 100). It is observed that children who lack supportive contexts, such as those facing severe environmental stresses or biological vulnerability to emotional problems, emotion regulation often can be expressed in obtained coping patterns that lead to the deepening of some affective problems rather than their reduction (Thompson & Calkins, 1996, pp. 163 – 182; Thompson et al., 1995, pp. 261 – 299).

”Emotional awareness is the ability to conceptualize and describe one’s own emotions and those of others. Evidence suggests that emotional awareness facilitates better emotion self-regulation, a more effective ability to navigate complex social situations and enjoy relationships, and improved physical and mental health” (Lane & Smith, 2021, p. 9).

According to Dimova “The development of social skills that manage the child’s ability to successfully interact and cooperate with peers and adults,

autonomy and independence as a combination of self-control, self-learning and self-service, critical thinking and the ability to identify social problems and solve them in a way that is equally satisfactory to both parties, are part of the accomplished elements of “social competence” (Dimova, 2023, pp. 373 – 376). For children of primary school age, emotional awareness plays a crucial role in their development and socialization, with effects that can extend into adulthood. As a result, this aspect of early development has increasingly drawn the interest of researchers. During early socialization, children employ various emotional regulation strategies to cope with challenges and better adjust to their surroundings. Early skills in managing emotions are strong predictors of later peer relationships and personality development, making emotional regulation a vital component of young children’s emotional growth. In the past decade, developmental psychology has placed growing emphasis on studying how children regulate their emotions. Scholars have extensively explored the features and progression of children’s emotional regulation abilities. This focus stems from the fact that emotional regulation is essential for individual survival and adaptation, particularly for children of primary school age, which serves as the formative stage for these abilities and sets the groundwork for future development. Gaining insight into how children’s emotional regulation strategies evolve helps deepen our understanding of these strategies as a whole (Yuhang, 2019, pp. 34 – 40).

Emotion regulation serves as a lens for understanding how emotions shape our focus and behavior. It helps explain how emotions can support purposeful, sustained, or forceful actions to tackle challenges, find solutions, and protect well-being — while at the same time, they can also cloud judgment and decision-making, complicate social interactions and relationships, and even pose health risks (Cole, et al., 1994, pp. 73 – 100), (Gross & Munoz, 1995, pp. 151 – 164).

Methodology

The outcomes presented in this section represent a conceptual operationalization of emotional regulation strategies for pedagogical observation and application rather than empirical research findings. Based on the theoretical synthesis, emotional regulation in primary education can be supported through practices that emphasize emotional awareness, reflection, and constructive expression.

The present study aims to propose appropriate models for emotional regulation that would be suitable for application in the pedagogical process with children of primary school age.

The conceptual frame of the main study is focused on the following tasks:

- theoretical observation of the emotional regulation mechanisms;
- developing appropriate emotional awareness practices for children of primary school age as a prerequisite for effective emotional regulation.

Theoretical observation of the emotional regulation mechanisms

When studying emotion regulation in children, it is essential to consider the diverse interpretations presented in various scientific studies, which differ in terms of the types of emotional regulation mechanisms employed, the methods used to measure these mechanisms, and the criteria used to evaluate individual emotional regulation strategies. There are also differences in the attitude to investigate the mechanism of coping with emotions in general or with a specific emotion.

The concept of emotional regulation should be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses various behavioral and biological processes. Some researchers even outline the challenges of the process by pointing out that “emotion regulation is a component of (rather than a response to) emotional activation, that it derives from the mutual influence of multiple emotion-related systems (rather than the maturation of higher control processes alone), and that it sometimes contributes to maladaptive behavioral outcomes, especially in conditions of environmental adversity” (Thompson et al., 2008, pp. 124 – 131).

As Yuhang discussed, Fang and Guopeng categorize children’s emotional regulation strategies into six categories based on empirical research results: self-comfort, alternative activities, passive coping, venting, problem-solving, and cognitive reconstruction. Saarni divides emotional regulation strategies into two categories according to whether the situation is controllable or not: 1. The situation is moderate to highly controllable: strategies proposed by children include problem solving, seeking caregivers, staying away from stimulation, internal strategies (self-blame, anxiety, anxiety), and external strategies (blaming others, aggressive behavior). 2. Emotion is low to uncontrollable: the strategies proposed by children include leaving the situation or emotion, redefining the situation or emotion, seeking more information, avoiding, denying, and withdrawing from the situation.

Results and Discussion

Observational Methods

If we take the children’s emotional regulation strategies, proposed by Fang and Guopeng, as shown in the text above, and use their six categories as practical indicators, we can try to measure the children’s emotional regulation skills.

Below is a proposed operationalized criterion for each of these six emotional regulation strategies – self-comfort, alternative activities, passive coping, venting, problem-solving, and cognitive reconstruction:

1. Self-Comfort

Definition: The child uses actions to soothe themselves physically or emotionally.

Possible criteria:

- seeks a safe or quiet space when upset;
- engages in self-soothing behaviors;

- verbally expresses a need for comfort;
- returns to a calm state within a reasonable time after using a comfort strategy.

2. Alternative Activities

Definition: The child shifts attention to another activity to distract themselves from the emotional trigger.

Possible criteria:

- chooses another activity without prompting when upset;
- can name alternative things to do to feel better;
- engages in the new activity for a meaningful time;
- reports feeling better or calmer after the switch.

3. Passive Coping

Definition: The child tolerates the emotional situation without acting to change it, but doesn't escalate it.

Possible criteria:

- stays calm and quiet even when upset;
- does not display aggressive or disruptive behaviors;
- waits for the situation to pass without seeking active solutions;
- uses withdrawal appropriately.

4. Vent

Definition: The child releases feelings by expressing them outwardly.

Possible criteria:

- expresses feelings with words;
- may cry or show tears instead of internalizing completely;
- seeks a trusted person to talk to;
- after venting, shows signs of emotional relief.

5. Problem Solving

Definition: The child tries to actively resolve the cause of the negative emotion.

Possible criteria:

- identifies the problem that triggered the feeling;
- suggests or tries possible solutions;
- seeks adult support if needed;
- shows reduced distress after the solution attempt.

6. Cognitive Reconstruction

Definition: The child reinterprets the situation to change their emotional response.

Possible criteria:

- says or shows understanding that things aren't as bad as first thought;
- uses self-talk to change perspective;
- accepts positive reframing offered by an adult or peer
- shows flexibility in thinking about causes or consequences.

These six emotional regulation strategies, as described above along with their corresponding criteria, can be used in a teacher/parent rating scale. Possible instructions:

Please rate how often you observe the child using each behavior over the past week/month. Use the scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Always

The proposed scale can be used independently or as an assessment tool to determine the level of emotional regulation in children before and after the implementation of the practices suggested below.

Emotional awareness practices for children of primary school age as a prerequisite for effective emotional regulation: an author's model of emotional regulation in the context of its application in a pedagogical environment.

The proposed authors' model below is designed as a flexible and transferable structure that can be adapted to different educational contexts. It emphasizes formative rather than diagnostic use and supports teachers in observing emotional regulation processes as part of everyday pedagogical interaction. The approach encourages children to perceive emotions as meaningful signals rather than obstacles, thereby fostering a positive attitude toward emotional experiences.

Since emotional regulation is key to school readiness, psycho-emotional climate, and health, it is important to support children from an early age in developing skills for effective emotion management so that they feel full participants in the family, school, and social environment.

The implementation of such practices can be commented on in several directions:

- the interaction between teacher and student in the light of shared emotional regulation;
- methods of support in the process of dealing with feelings;
- correlation between techniques for emotional awareness and achieving emotional balance.

Methodological guidelines for incorporating socio-emotional practices and coping strategies within the pedagogical process are presented below. A mechanism for integrating a program that incorporates techniques for emotional awareness and regulation, such as mindfulness, role-playing, art pedagogical practices, and self-reflection, is proposed. Some of the proposed interventions include recognizing the emotional play and learn practice, a self-awareness diary to measure emotional regulation and behavioral academic attitudes, and reflective journals on emotional challenges and coping strategies. The proposed practices are based on the implications of the creative approach.” Through the creative process, students develop skills of empathy, mutual respect, and collective belonging, which prepare them to cope with challenges both within and beyond the educational environment” (Abner, 2024, pp. 303 – 308).

To strengthen children's ability to recognize, name, express, and reflect on their emotions, as a foundation for using appropriate emotional regulation strategies, an author's model of emotional regulation in the context of its application in a pedagogical environment is presented:

Structure: 5 Sessions (each 40 – 50 min)

Target group:

Primary school children (ages 7 – 11)

Session 1: Getting to Know Our Feelings

Main method: Narrative & discussion

Activity: Read or tell a short fairytale. Pause and ask: “*How do you think the main character felt?*” Children share similar feelings from their own lives. Use simple feeling cards or emojis to support discussion.

Aim: Builds vocabulary and recognition for “Emotional Awareness” items.

Session 2: Feelings Detectives

Main method: Narrative & acting

Activity: Act out short scenes from the story. Children take turns playing characters. Freeze at key moments – ask others to guess the feeling. Add “*How do we know? Face, voice, body?*”

Aim: Builds skill to read emotions in self and others.

Session 3: Color My Mood

Main method: Art

Activity: “Body Map” – children draw an outline figure. Pick one emotion (e.g., anger, fear, happiness). Color where they feel it – heart, stomach, head, hands. Share: “*When did you feel this? What helped you feel better?*”

Aim: Connects feelings to physical signs – supports self-comfort and awareness.

Session 4: Emotion Charades & Feelings Buddy

Main method: Game & play

Activity 1: Play Emotion Charades in pairs or groups.

Activity 2: Each child has a puppet/stuffed animal – they tell how the “buddy” felt in a situation. Peers ask: “*What could help your buddy feel better?*”

Aim: Builds expression and opens ideas for strategies (venting, comfort, alternatives).

Session 5: Changing the Ending

Main method: Narrative and problem-solving

Activity: Reread the same or new story with conflict.

Ask: “*How could the character feel differently?*” “*What could they do to solve the problem?*”

Draw or act out the new ending.

Aim: Connects awareness to regulation strategies (problem solving, cognitive reconstruction).

The table below shows the link between each mini-program session to the specific emotional awareness and emotional regulation skills it targets, based on the six categories plus the emotional awareness category.

Table 1. Link between sessions, main activities, and targeted skills

Session	Main Activity	Targeted Skills
Session 1: Getting to Know Our Feelings	Storytelling & discussion	Emotional Awareness (recognizing and naming feelings)
Session 2: Feelings Detectives	Role-play & guessing emotions	Emotional Awareness (reading emotions in self and others)
Session 3: Color My Mood	Art – body map coloring	Emotional Awareness (linking emotions to physical sensations), Self-Comfort
Session 4: Emotion Charades & Feelings Buddy	Game & puppet play	Emotional Awareness (expressing emotions), Vent, Self-Comfort, Alternative Activities
Session 5: Changing the Ending	Story revision & problem solving	Emotional Awareness, Problem Solving, Cognitive Reconstruction

Conclusions and summary

Emotional regulation skills represent a foundational element of educational well-being and play a vital role in children's successful participation in the pedagogical process. The present article highlights the significance of emotional regulation in primary school education and offers a conceptual framework for its systematic support through pedagogical practices. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives and proposing an original pedagogical model, the article demonstrates how emotional regulation can be meaningfully integrated into educational settings. The model supports the creation of emotionally supportive learning environments and provides a basis for further research and pedagogical innovation aimed at enhancing children's well-being and adaptive capacity.

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