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Emotional Education in Early Childhood: Strategies for Developing Empathy

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Summary

This article analyzes the importance of emotional education in early childhood as a key strategy for developing empathy. The research, based on a literature review, shows that emotion, cognition, and affectivity are interdependent dimensions that support meaningful learning, socialization, and the development of emotional bonds. The results show that empathy is a learnable skill, strengthened by pedagogical practices such as storytelling, which foster imagination, emotional expression, and social maturation. The conclusion is that investing in emotional education from the earliest years contributes to raising children who are more self-aware, open to cooperation, and prepared to deal with differences, becoming a structuring axis of early childhood education.

Keywords: Emotional education; early childhood; Empathy; Affection; Socioemotional skills.

Abstract

This article analyzes the importance of emotional education in early childhood as an essential strategy for the development of empathy. Based on a literature review, the study highlights that emotion, cognition, and affectivity are interdependent dimensions that sustain meaningful learning, socialization, and the construction of affective bonds. The results show that empathy is a learnable skill, strengthened by pedagogical practices such as storytelling, which foster imagination, emotional expression, and social maturity. It is concluded that investing in emotional education from early childhood contributes to forming children who are more self-aware, open to cooperation, and prepared to deal with differences, consolidating it as a structuring axis of early childhood education.

Keywords: Emotional education; Early childhood; Empathy; Affectivity; Socio-emotional skills.



1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to conjecture about the importance of emotional education in the first childhood, understanding it as a fundamental stage for the integral formation of the child, as it is in this period in which the affective, cognitive and social bases that will influence the entire development are structured future.

Early childhood education represents a period characterized by intense discoveries, such as the acquisition of language, cognitive development and the expansion of social bonds. In this context, the strengthening socio-emotional skills becomes necessary for the teaching process to learning becomes more humanized.

The balance between cognitive and emotional aspects is established as one of the determining pillars for pedagogical success, since learning involves the ability to integrate reason and feeling into a same training process, thus ensuring the assimilation of content and the development of socio-emotional skills essential for life in society.

Emotion favors concentration, motivation and memory; empathy makes it possible to understand and respect differences; and affection supports mutual trust between teacher and student, creating conditions for effective learning, while strengthening the development of human values essential, such as solidarity, cooperation and respect for diversity.

Thus, the general objective of this article is to analyze the role of emotional education in the first childhood as a strategy for developing empathy. Specific objectives include: Discussing the relationship between cognition, emotion and affectivity in the learning process; identify the practices pedagogical practices that favor the development of empathy; and reflect on early childhood education as a space of building affective and social bonds.

For a better understanding of this topic, the methodology adopted in this study is based on a bibliographic review, seeking to analyze the theoretical contributions of authors who address the relationship between emotional education and the development of empathy.

The choice of this path is due to the fact that the literature review allows us to gather different perspectives among researchers. The references consulted were selected from searches in databases of national and international academic data, as well as books and articles.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 Emotional Education in Early Childhood

The environment in which a child lives influences their brain and emotions, helping to shape thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This happens because the brain works through impulses electrochemicals that give rise to mental processes such as attention, memory, language, pleasure and pain.

According to Silva et al., (2024), these impulses are mediated by synapses, connections between neurons

that release neurotransmitters, and it is through these correspondences that information circulates, allowing both learning and experiencing emotional experiences.

Therefore, for Duque (2024), the development of emotional skills is fundamental for that children make the most of their daily activities, considering that affection and cognition operate interdependently, allowing learning to become more meaningful and lived experiences are consolidated for integral growth.

In this sense, Daniel and Michel Chabot (2005) highlight the importance of the emotional factor in learning and academic success, highlighting that emotional skills can clarify success in different areas of life, as they directly influence the way the child deals with challenges, establishes interpersonal relationships and develops autonomy to face complex situations.

Likewise, Luck and Carneiro (1983) reinforce that everything that is learned, forgotten or stops learning is influenced by emotions, so that each affective reaction assumes a performance individual in the educational process.

Affectivity, therefore, involves internal feelings that are expressed as external emotions, impacting the way the child interacts with the environment (Silva; Sérgio; Bicudo, 2023). Furthermore, values, interests and attitudes are interceded by affection, influencing the perception of the world and decision-making decisions.

Contemporary science no longer accepts the rigid separation between emotion and cognition, as both systems work in an integrated manner, enabling significant learning and development integral (Duque, 2024). Thus, it is up to the teacher to be attentive to the students' emotional needs, creating a motivating environment in which positive emotions favor the acquisition of knowledge and strengthen pedagogical bonds.

According to Cury (2001), training emotions means developing important functions of intelligence, how to manage thoughts, protect yourself from stress, think before acting, put yourself in other people's shoes, pursue goals and value life. Duque et al., (2023) adds that affection moves our minds and feelings, being decisive for academic and personal success. Pecotche (1996) highlights that adherence between mental and sensitive systems arouses emotional energy that sustains actions, words and intentions, strengthening the child's learning and development.

The teacher's role in emotional education is, therefore, strategic, as it is up to him to create a safe environment in which the child feels respected, promoting cognitive, social and emotional balance, which are essential aspects for integral development (Silva et al., 2025).

Chabot and Chabot (2005) and Silva et al., (2024) highlight that many learning difficulties are emotional, because children can be brilliant in discussions but perform poorly at school due to emotional gaps, which demonstrates the need for attention to emotional skills, which influence concentration, attention, memory and pleasure in learning, as well as the ability to deal with challenges and frustrations.

In this way, affectivity proves to be central to socialization, interaction with the world and building bonds, as it is through this that the child develops mental health, emotional intelligence and

social skills are imperative for academic and personal success (Silva et al., 2024). Wallon (1994) reinforces this perspective by highlighting that the emotional impulse connects the child to his environment, awakening the curiosity, stimulating exploration and promoting integral development.

In this sense, emotional education in early childhood becomes essential, since investing in strengthening the affective and cognitive aspects prepares individuals who are aware of their emotions, capable to build learning and establish solid foundations for life.

2.2 Developing Social Skills in Early Childhood

To understand the development of social skills in early childhood, it is important differentiate between social competence and social performance. Social competence refers to the set of knowledge, attitudes and skills that allow the individual to interact appropriately in disparate contexts, while social performance comprises the practical application of these skills in situations authentic forms of coexistence (Silva et al., 2025).

The study of social skills has important historical lineages. In 1949, Salter, inspired through Pavlov's research on conditioned reflexes, he developed techniques aimed at improving verbal communication and facial expressions, establishing an innovative approach to understanding human interaction (Canton, 2025).

Wolpe (1958) expanded this field of investigation by considering behaviors related to expression of negative feelings and the defense of personal rights, introducing the concept of assertiveness as an essential dimension of social skills, since the ability to express oneself contributes to the conflict resolution, strengthens interpersonal relationships and promotes the development of individuals emotionally competent from childhood.

According to Falcone et al., (2008), the quality of social relationships is linked to mental health and global development of the individual. Social development begins at birth, with the repertoire of social skills becomes more complex throughout childhood. Duque (2024) explains that in adolescence and adulthood, new demands arise, such as group work, leadership, skills interpersonal and interaction with different cultural groups.

Falcone et al. (2008) highlight that empathic interactions, when combined with assertiveness, are fundamental to the success of social relationships. Empathy, understood as the ability to understand feelings and perspectives of others and expressing genuine care for their well-being constitutes a essential skill for effective communication from early childhood. Canton (2025) explains that in this period, the child learns to recognize and regulate emotions, building bonds that support their socialization and its integral development.

Furthermore, the authors emphasize that empathy and assertiveness are not opposed, but complement each other. in different social contexts, when empathy is more appropriate to encourage dialogue and cooperation, while in others assertiveness is essential to guarantee rights and establish limits. In both cases, such skills contribute to the resolution of interpersonal conflicts, strengthening the

quality of the relationships that the child establishes throughout life.

In early childhood, the practice of empathy, incorporated into assertiveness, allows the child to build balanced relationships, learning to understand others, share feelings and deal with conflicts in a respectful manner (Silva; Sérgio; Bicudo, 2023). The development of these social skills from an early age contributes to the formation of individuals emotionally prepared for the challenges of life in society.

2.3 Empathy in Early Childhood

The word empathy originates from ancient Greece, deriving from the term *empathēia*, which meant passion or intense affective involvement. Baldwin (1913) describes the historical concept of artistic empathy how through *Einführung*, subjective properties such as nobility, elegance and power could be felt as if they belonged to his works of art, as if these were living beings.

In the 1960s, the concept of empathy came to be understood as empathic understanding, or that is, the ability to perceive and respond to another person's feelings and reactions (Silva et al., 2024; Duque, 2024). Fontgalland and Moreira (2012) state that the concept of empathic understanding consists of that the therapist be sensitive to the feelings and personal reactions that the client experiences in each moment.

Falcone et al., (2008) define empathy as a lifelong learnable skill, present in social and moral behaviors, being typical, although not exclusive, of the human species. Duque et al., (2023) describe empathy as the ability to recognize feelings and identify with the perspective of the other, manifesting reactions that express this understanding and this feeling.

Silva; Sérgio; Bicudo (2023), clarify that empathy does not establish experiencing the same feelings of the other, but rather to understand precisely what the other feels. Falcone et al., (2008), with based on Hoffman (1997), divides empathy into three essential components:

- **Cognitive:** this is the ability to understand other people's feelings and perspectives;
- **Affective:** refers to the feeling of compassion, sympathy and concern for the well-being of others;
- **Behavioral:** this is the expression of this understanding, through actions or communication that show empathy.

Empathy also manifests itself in two stages: empathic understanding and empathic verbalization. According to Falcone et al., (2008), it is the ability to accurately understand, as well as share or consider someone's feelings, needs, and perspectives, expressing that understanding of such way that the other person feels understood and validated.

In the context of human relationships, empathy plays a crucial role. Falcone et al., (2008) states that empathetic individuals tend to experience more satisfying relationships, both in married life as in friendships, promoting bonds of trust, acceptance and mutual respect.

In early childhood, empathy manifests itself from the earliest stages of human development, with pre-empathetic reactions, such as emotional contagion in the face of another's suffering, which evolve into



more complex forms of understanding and empathic expression. However, feeling anguish for another is not sufficient; the behavioral expression of empathy, verbal or nonverbal, is essential for the child realize that the other understands you (Duque et al., 2023).

Researchers such as Silva; Sérgio and Bicudo (2023), show that the cognitive and affective aspects of empathy are essential in everyday interactions. Developing empathy in early childhood means teach children to recognize feelings, understand other people's perspectives and act in a supportive manner, laying the foundation for lifelong social relationships.

2.4 Storytelling as a Strategy for Emotional Education in Childhood

For storytelling to contribute to children's emotional education, it is essential that the teller carefully choose the narrative you want to convey, considering the emotion you intend to convey project. As Bussato (2003) points out, before sensitizing the listener, the story is concerned with sensitizing the storyteller, so the narrator needs to identify with the story, aligning it with the interests and age group of the children's audience.

Canton (2025) adds that, before telling a story, it is essential to identify whether it is engaging, original, well-structured, and appropriate for stimulating children's imagination. For Silva et al., (2024), the narrative functions as a source of nourishment for emotional development, and should reverse the stage of cognitive and affective maturation of listeners.

Children's literature has the potential to awaken the imagination, as it presents situations loaded with emotions and conflicts that challenge the child to reflect and interpret without relying on rules rigid constraints of time or space (Silva et al., 2025). The stories address diverse themes – fear, affection, rejection, adventures, discoveries and magic – each bringing a lesson or reflection for development childish emotional.

For example, in *Little Red Riding Hood* by the Brothers Grimm, the protagonist's disobedience illustrates to children the importance of listening to role models and understanding the consequences of their choices (Canton, 2025). *The Ugly Duckling*, by Christian Andersen (2022), addresses rejection and acceptance, showing that each individual has unique value and potential.

The use of image albums is an effective strategy to promote early contact with literature, allowing the child to interpret a visual language even before learning to read. According to Duque et al., (2023), from the first years of their life, the child, immersed in books, is invited to interpret a first language – visual – which, despite establishing learning, does not require literacy.

Another relevant aspect is the element of the wonderful present in children's literature. Canton (2025) highlights that, through psychoanalysis, wonderful tales reflect universal questions of human life, being important instruments for the emotional maturation of children. Imagination, in this context, plays a fundamental role, because it contributes to the formation of personality and the ability to designate and deliberate conflicts.



Vygotsky (2007) reinforces that creative processes develop in childhood, making imagination, a fundamental skill for intellectual and emotional growth. During this period, the school environment plays a strategic role, as it is where children experience part of their social experiences. Observes the behaviors, values, and intentions of others, internalizing these experiences and learning to deal with your emotions.

Therefore, storytelling, combined with emotional education strategies, awakens the imagination and forms individuals capable of understanding and managing their emotions from the earliest years of life, at the same time that it promotes reflection, empathy and social skills, contributing to the construction of an integral and balanced development, based on the integration between cognition, affectivity and creativity.

3 RESULTS

The analysis of the consulted literature shows that emotional education in early childhood is recognized as a fundamental element for the development of empathy and for integral formation of the child. The authors analyzed offer contributions that complement each other, albeit in different ways and approaches, allowing us to understand how cognition, emotion and affectivity intertwine in the process of learning and building social bonds.

In general, there is convergence among researchers when they point out that emotions are determinants in child development, influencing both learning and social relationships. This finding is relevant when considering the objective of the present study, which sought to analyze how emotional education can constitute a strategy for the development of empathy.

In this sense, Table 1 summarizes the authors' main contributions, allowing a comprehensive view comparative of their approaches:

Table 1 – Summary of authors and their contributions

Author(s)	Main contributions	Relationship with Emotional Education and Empathy
Chabot & Chabot (2005)	Learning difficulties have emotional origins; they reinforce the need to work on emotional skills, influence memory, and emotions to enhance attention and enjoyment of learning.	to work on emotional skills, influence apprenticeship.
Luck & Carneiro (1983)	Emotions influence what is learned, forgotten or not learned.	They show that emotion is a constitutive part of the educational process.
Silva; Sérgio & assertiveness strengthen bonds. (2023)	Affection shapes social interactions; empathy and Bicudo	They point to empathy as a daily practice in childhood.
Cury (2001)	Training your emotions develops self-control, resilience, and the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes.	Emotional education as a life practice.



Author(s)	Main contributions	Relationship with Emotional Education and Empathy
Duque et al. (2023)	Affection moves the mind and feelings; empathy is recognizing and identifying with the other.	They highlight empathy as an essential social skill.
Pecotche (1996)	The union between mind and emotion generates energy for actions and intentions.	and emotional education as mental and affective integration.
Wallon (1994)	Emotion connects children to their surroundings, stimulates curiosity and driver of exploration.	exploration. Emotion as a integral development.
Salter (1949); Wolpe (1958)	Expression of feelings and assertiveness as social skills.	They contribute to the understanding of empathy in interactions.
Falcone et al. (2008)	Empathy is learnable; it involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.	Solid theoretical framework for understanding empathy.
Baldwin (1913)	Historical concept of empathy (Einfühlung).	Philosophical basis for further studies.
Fontgalland & Moreira (2012)	Empathy as sensitivity to the feelings and reactions of others.	They emphasize the relational dimension of empathy.
to touch the listener.	The narrator needs to identify with the story for Bussato (2003)	Pedagogical strategy of emotional and empathic stimulation.
Canton (2025)	Fairy tales as reflections of universal issues, Children's literature as	a way to promote emotional maturity. emotional education.
Vygotsky (2007)	Imagination as a fundamental skill in childhood for the development	of empathy.
Silva et al. (2025)	Importance of playfulness in child development.	Playful activities as promoters of affective and emotional bonds.

Sources: Survey data, 2025.

4 DISCUSSION

From table 1, it can be seen that there is strong convergence among the authors in recognizing the centrality of emotions in early childhood. Chabot & Chabot (2005) and Lück & Carneiro (1983) highlight that learning is linked to emotions, which aligns with Wallon's (1994) view, which understands the emotional impulse as a driving force for integral development.

Other researchers, such as Cury (2001), Duque et al. (2023) and Pecotche (1996), expand on this perspective by emphasizing that emotional education is a strategy for developing life skills, such as self-control, resilience and empathy, showing that emotion and cognition go hand in hand.

In the field of social skills, Salter (1949) and Wolpe (1958) introduced the importance of assertiveness, which connects to the contributions of Falcone et al. (2008). The latter structure empathy as a multidimensional, cognitive, affective and behavioral competence, making it clear that it is not about an innate characteristic, but rather learnable and cultivated. Fontgalland & Moreira (2012) and Duque et al. (2023) complement this vision, highlighting sensitivity and recognition of the other's feelings as essential part of empathy.



In the field of pedagogical strategies, authors such as Bussato (2003), Cantão (2025), Silva et al. (2025) and Vygotsky (2007) converge in highlighting the importance of literature, storytelling and playfulness for children's emotional development. These practices spark imagination, stimulate sensitivity and create spaces of identification that favor the exercise of empathy.

Regarding divergences, it is observed that Baldwin (1913) presents a concept of empathy more philosophical and aesthetic (*Einfühlung*), distinct from the contemporary view of Falcone et al. (2008) and Silva; Sérgio & Bicudo (2023), who treat it as a practical and everyday skill.

Furthermore, while some authors (Chabot & Chabot, 2005; Lück & Carneiro, 1983) offer highlighting the influence of emotion on school performance, others (Duque et al., 2023; Falcone et al., 2008) prioritize empathy as a social and relational skill.

In general, the results show that emotional education is a strategic path for development of empathy in early childhood, whether through the appreciation of affection in the process of learning, through the construction of social relationships or through the use of pedagogical practices that stimulate imagination, emotional expression and emotional bond.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study allowed us to understand that emotional education in early childhood constitutes a indispensable foundation for the integral formation of the child, acting directly on the development of empathy and the quality of social relationships. The literature review showed that emotion, cognition and affectivity cannot be seen as isolated dimensions, but rather as interdependent processes that support learning, socialization and the construction of emotional bonds.

The authors analyzed converge in highlighting that emotion influences attention, memory, motivation and pleasure in learning, while supporting the ability to understand and respect others. In this sense, empathy is revealed as a learnable skill that must be encouraged from the first years of life, whether through affection in the school environment or through the practice of strategies pedagogical practices that favor emotional expression and balanced social coexistence.

The contributions of Chabot & Chabot, Wallon and Lück & Carneiro reinforce that emotion is the driving force of integral development and meaningful learning. Authors have expanded this understanding by addressing empathy as a cognitive, affective and behavioral skill, essential for human coexistence. Strategies such as storytelling have proven to be effective resources for sparking imagination, dealing with with conflicts and promote emotional maturity.

It is therefore concluded that investing in emotional education in early childhood means forming children who are more self-aware, more open to cooperation and better prepared to deal with differences. Therefore, it is up to the school and educators to take an active role in this process, creating environments of acceptance and respect, in which emotion and cognition go hand in hand.

Finally, this study points to the need to expand research and practices that consolidate the emotional education as a structuring axis of early childhood education, so that empathy ceases to be a

desired competence and becomes a reality in everyday school and social life.

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