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Do you feel what I feel? Emotional development in children with ID

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Abstract

Do you feel what I feel? Emotional development in children with ID is a study that has emerged as a need to deepen the knowledge on this area. It has focused in a case study methodology with the use of three validated instruments to a sample of thirty-four children, twenty attending the 1st cycle and fourteen attending the 2nd, in two school groupings of Castelo Branco city. Seventeen of them have mild intellectual disability and seventeen are “normal”, aged between 8 and 14.

The research has been developed in order to give answers to questions related with the way that children with intellectual disability (ID) express, identify and regulate their emotions.

The results suggest that children with intellectual disability identify emotions, in a general way, the same way that “normal” children do, nevertheless, there are some difficulties in the understanding and organization of coping strategies.

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Introduction

For too long the emotion has been seen as an irrelevant variable and it was even relegated to low priority in the Psychology research (Eisenberg, 2006). However, currently, it seems clear that there is a relationship between emotion and cognitive, perceptual, social and self-regulation processes which explain the growing interest in the study of this variable in several knowledge areas (Saarni, Campos, Camras & Witherington, 2006).

One of those areas is the development Psychology which has been trying to realize how children recognize, understand and regulate their emotions, more specifically which changes occur throughout their development. This knowledge appears to be extremely important, not only from a scientific point of view, but also from a clinical and educational perspective (Holmbeck, Greenley & Franks, 2003).

Emotions are a multifaceted phenomenon which lies within an intersection area between mind and body, being its diversity and complexity the rationale for the multiplicity of perspectives and the divergence of viewpoints (Estrada, 2008).

Emotion is a psychological production in which intervene the cognitive, of physiological activation, motor-expressive, motivational and subjective components (Freitas-Magalhães, 2009). According to this author, as a physiological response, emotion is a complex state of feeling which includes conscious experience, internal and explicit responses and power to motivate the body for action.

Damásio (2000) distinguishes three categories of emotions: background emotions, primary or basic emotions and social emotions. The background emotions correspond to regulatory body responses and contribute to a general welfare or malaise. The primary or elementary emotions are generated through distinct neural and chemical circuits and they're universal. Examples of primary emotions are fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness and happiness. Finally, social emotions such as sympathy, compassion, embarrassment, shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, envy, gratitude and admiration integrate background and primary emotions' components, being biologically determined but also socially learned (Damásio, 2000).

Regarding to the emotions' functions Ekman (1992) and Davidson (2000) consider that they recruit physiological changes necessary for the body to respond in an evolutionary adaptive way, where each specific emotion prepares the body for a set of actions; they modify the cognitive activity, once emotion may make cognition impossible, but it also may promote it; in another angle emotions provide affective information since that being aware of our feelings enables us to make value judgments and take decisions based on what we feel. Another function of the emotions is that they facilitate phylogenetically adaptive responses; furthermore, they also organize the subjective, behavioural and physiological components of the emotional process, they have particular functions and interpersonal functions since they report others about our motivations pushing them to act.

Although it isn't clear yet what the meaning which establishes the link between cognition and emotion is, it is clear the existence of a relation between them, being expected that, throughout the development, systematic changes will occur in the emotions' understanding since the underlying cognitive structures will also be modified (Sá, 1989).

There are several studies that emphasize a conceptual hierarchy in the development of emotions' understanding (Altshuler & Ruble, 1989; Donaldson & Westerman, 1986; Graham, Doubleday & Guarino, 1984; Harter & Buddin, 1987; Reissland, 1985; Saarni, 1984, quoted by Alves, 2008) and besides the differences between the methodological and conceptual levels, there is an agreement point among all of them which regards the existence of a change, between five and twelve years old, age group which includes the sample of the study, in children's understanding about several aspects of emotion: the understanding of emotional states and expressions, the existence of concurrent feelings, of rules of expression and the ability of emotions' self-regulation (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook & Quama, 1995).

In the studies of emotion spectrum Ekman, Izard, Mandler, Panksepp and Plutchik's theories (nd cited by Freitas-Magalhães, 2009) are those that deserve more agreement. The eleven basic emotions categorized on their theories are: happiness, interest, excitement, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame and guilt.

The basic emotions considered for the empirical study that this article focuses on are happiness, sadness, fear, anger, shame and guilt.

This way, the motivation for this study, continuing a previous one including only children aged between 10 and 12, starts from a need to deepen the understanding of emotional development in children with intellectual

disability, from now on ID, comparing it with “normal” children.

Backed by three instruments, Teresa Fagulha’s test “Era umavez...” (1994), “Caixa das emoções” from the Centre for Experimental Education, published in Portugal by Estúdio Didáctico (2004) and “Sobre os Amigos” written and illustrated by Natacha Santos (2013), we present in this paper a reflection on the emotions’ expression, identification and regulation in children with intellectual disability based on three initial key questions:

1. Do children with ID express their emotions the same way as “normal” children do?
2. Do children with ID identify the others’ emotions the same way as “normal” children do?
3. How do children with ID regulate their emotions?

To give these questions some answers we’ll make a research with a sample of thirty-four children, whereas seventeen have mild intellectual disability and seventeen are “normal”, aged between 8 and 14, in two school groupings of Castelo Branco city, with the parents and the school board’s consent.

1. Emotional development

Analyzing the different models of emotional development it appears that the focus varies in terms of the emotional development dimension that is privileged and in the relation that is assumed in, for instance, emotion and cognition (Melo, 2006).

The emotional development is influenced by changes occurring in other areas, like the motor or linguistic and cognitive, at the same time it is a source of influence for, for example, the social development and the relationship construction (Campos, Frankel and Camras, 2004).

Dunn & Brown (1994) add that what is involved in the emotional development is a greater ability of engagement and intimacy with others since the ability’s improvement to communicate emotional states will contribute to the intimacy’s construction and because during development the individual is being cultured in socially desired ways to behave with emotions.

Immediately after birth, babies reveal signs of disturbance, interest and repulsion. During the following months, these primary emotions differentiate in happiness, anger, surprise, sadness, shame and fear (Papalia et al., 2001).

At this age one of the main tasks is related to the onset of emotional experiences modulation (Izard et al., 2002). It is during this period that the child, through exposure to others’ emotional expressions, starts to learn the relationships between emotions and behaviors.

Components of expressions like the smile or the expression of interest, sadness or anger emotions feed one of the developmental tasks of these ages, the construction of binding relationships (Abe & Izard, 1999, cited by Melo & Soares, 2006).

At two, approximately, there is a great increase in the child’s ability to name emotions. If, at two, the child seems to be already able to use emotional labels, at three he starts to talk about the others’ emotional experiences and at four he can understand that emotional reactions may vary from person to person (Abe & Izard, 1999, referred by Melo & Soares, 2006).

Emotions related to the self awareness such as empathy, jealousy, embarrassment, shame, guilt and pride do not emerge until three years old, after the child has developed self-awareness, that is, the understanding that they are separate entities from other people and objects (Izard & Malatesta, 1987; Kopp, 1982, referred by Papalia, 2001).

At three the child has already knowledge of all basic emotions, and at this stage they tend to increase the behavior of anger and opposition (Ackerman & Izard, 2004). It is in this stage that the child happens to be able to deal with emotions without disrupting, to tolerate frustration, to know how to wait or replace his goals and to adjust his emotional expressiveness to the context (Sroufe, 1997, referred by Estrada, 2008). At this age children mostly use behavioral strategies to regulate emotions although they start using cognitive strategies.

It is between six and twelve years old that comes a change in the concept of emotion, where younger children give greater emphasis to observable components of emotion while older children give a greater relevance to the internal mental aspects (Harris, Olthof & Terwogt, 1981).

For the researchers Abe & Izard (1999, cited by Melo & Soares, 2006) this is a key period for the development of the self-concept and the social ability perception, strengthened by the comparison with others. The

emergence of social emotions facilitates this process of social comparison and the affective experiences greatly contribute to the creation of a self-picture. Besides that, the emotions' emergence in the context of relationship with peers and the discussion of those emotions may greatly contribute to the development of the capacity of social perspective taking (Abe & Izard, 1999, referred by Melo & Soares, 2006). Children begin here to feel self-evaluative or social emotions, even without an audience, but their assessment of the stimuli may vary according to age. For instance, the guilt experience may be triggered differently in children either below or above eight years old (Izard et al., 2002).

When the term “intellectual disability” is combined with “emotion” there are few identified articles (McClure et al., 2009). The mismatch between the quantity of articles published about ID and those that include, among the keywords, “emotions”, is curious. This way, the incidence of this study is, for this and other reasons, meaningful and useful and, thereafter, we'll refer to this topic in a specific way.

2. Intellectual disability and emotions

Intellectual disability is inserted into categorical systems for centuries, appearing as dementia and permanent impairment of rationality and behavior control. This may have contributed to the prejudice maintenance and may have influenced thinking and discriminatory attitudes towards ID (Ribeiro, 2008).

Intellectual disability is generally characterized by: emotional and social maladjustment; reduced vocabulary; simple and restricted interest; slow reaction; short attention span; inability to generalize and to abstract; limited initiative; absence of originality; inability of self-criticism; lack of studying habits; difficulty in the language level, requiring simple, detailed and specific matters; delay and precariousness of cognitive acquisitions; mismatch between the contents of their normal relational knowledge and the activities of a dysfunctional procedure which, assuming the maladjustments, articulates and combines them in atypical ways; construction of a disorganized and inadequate cognitive function, under a constructivist perspective (Barbosa, 2007).

According to Marinho (2000) ID, target of the empirical study mentioned below, implies an unchanged physical appearance, which may lead to a set of unreasonable expectation and to bigger failures in interpersonal relationships.

During adolescence their personality embodies the intellectual gap and the deviance, not adequately developing new interpersonal coping styles. Moreover, there will always be the individual's labeling as “different” which may promote emotional changes. Marinho (2000) adds that the person with ID is aware of his limitations as well as his inability to broadly integrate the sequences of the standard development in appropriate periods.

Emotions are knowledge primary sources, playing a major role in the individual's adaptation to the environment (Wallon, 1995, referred by Ressurreição et al., 2008) and they are the initiators of the learning process (Damásio, 2001). Thus, even if the cognitive limitations of the individual are high, he can interact with the world through his basic emotions. These seem to be a competent channel of cognitive abilities, justifying Damásio's belief (2001) when he states that children with Down syndrome understand more than they can express, once they feel emotions spontaneously and may turn them into knowledge, not always verbally expressed.

Emotion is the organic form under which the affectivity becomes objective since we're born, when, still indistinguishably and in a kind of mimesis, emotion arises underlying the child's consciousness on the exchange of gestures, looks, smiles, feelings which express the other's acceptance or refusal (Wallon, 1963, referred by Guhur, 2007).

Foreseeing this way the expression of emotions in affective behaviors of people with ID, it is assumed that it occurs, such as with “normal” people, through the involvement of elements belonging to different sensibilities, elements which, interconnected by various environmental circumstances, express themselves in a selective manner (Guhur, 2007). However, in some authors' opinion (Dekrey & Ehly, 1981, cited by Marinho, 2001), children with ID are classified as less adjusted and more anxious and depressed than their “normal” peers.

Most studies relating to emotions and their regulation in people with ID are targeted to the recognition of emotions. Those reveal that individuals with ID may, confidently, identify their own emotions (Lindsay et al., 2004, as cited in McClure et al., 2009). Generally, people with mild and moderate ID recognize emotional expressions in others (Moore, 2001). According to Bremejo (2006) the recognition of emotions from the part of individuals with ID has several flaws and gaps when compared with “normal” individuals with the same age.

Regarding to the experience of emotions the same author considers that individuals with ID live their emotions in accordance with the pleasure or tension dimensions, the same way that “normal” children, youth and adults do (Bremejo, 2006).

Moore (2001) on his turn considers that the ability to discriminate pleasant from unpleasant emotions is equally precise for individuals with and without ID. Though, individuals with ID have more difficulty in labeling/identifying specific emotions.

Glenn and Cunningham (2002) mention that in individuals with ID the development of the self-regulating process is significantly slower than in “normal” individuals, being identified some specific deficits such as difficulty in planning, in monitoring and in the flexibility of problem solving, in the self-regulated attention, difficulty in performing requests, poor persistence capacity, high support request during a task and also a poor self-motivation (Vieillevoye & Nader-Grosbois, 2008).

According to Berkson (1993), behavioral and developmental features of individuals with ID, such as a lower self-concept differentiation, poor sense of self-efficacy and low competence perceived in several areas of their life, seem to contribute to a greater emotional vulnerability and increased difficulties in terms of behavioral self-control and emotional self-regulation.

With the emotions characterized, as well as the emotional development and its evolution in ID, it is appropriate to allude to the empirical study concerning the referred topic.

We believe this is a very pertinent and relevant study, not only because it addresses a little investigated topic in Portugal, but also because we estimate there is a need to deepen the knowledge of emotional development in children with ID and compare it with “normal” children’s development.

3. Empirical study

3.1. Methodology

This study is essentially qualitative and it’s organized as a comparative case study because the main purpose is to understand and give children voice by comparing, subsequently, the results obtained in children with ID with the results obtained in “normal” children.

The motivation to carry out this study arises as a need to deepen the knowledge of emotional development in children with ID and compare it with “normal” children’s development. For this we have based on three starting questions which we consider essential:

1. Do children with ID express their emotions the same way as “normal” children do?
2. Do children with ID identify emotions in others the same way as “normal” children do?
3. How do children with ID regulate their emotions?

3.2. Sample

In this study it is employed a convenience non-probabilistic sample (Gil, 2006) and to provide it we took into account the features of the subjects to whom we would apply the tests, being that, in a sample of 34 subjects, 17 have ID and 17 are “normal”. Also, the subjects of the sample are boys and girls in equal number, students of the 1st and 2nd cycles in two school groupings of Castelo Branco city, aged between 8 and 14. It is important to refer that the sample of children with ID does not reveal a very marked cognitive deficit, belonging to an inclusive school context.

3.3. Data collection

In this study we’ll carry out semi-structured interviews during the testing since they enable to provide a structure through selected topics in order to conduct the interview. They are prepared certain questions but the interviewees are free to talk about the issue and to express their opinions and the interviewer merely asks questions and probes opinions. For Bogdan and Bliken (1994, p.135) “in this kind of interview we may be sure of obtaining comparable data between the different interviewees”, which is very important for this study.

Still according to Azevedo (2003) during the interview there is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee which makes it necessary to observe certain behavioral aspects.

3.4. Instruments

For this study we've used three instruments: The Teresa Fagulha's projective test "Era umavez..." (1997), the "Caixa das Emoções" from the Centre for Experimental Education, published in Portugal by Estúdio Didáctico (2004) and a children's book by Natacha Santos entitled "Sobre os amigos" (2013), validated by experts in the areas of Psychology and Children Literature.

In the projective test "Era uma vez..." there is an expectation of leisure activity with the purpose of studying the way children elaborate their emotions, particularly anxiety and pleasure (Estrada, 2008). Showing three illustrations on cards which provide a part of the story that should be completed by the child by resorting other cards, the child participates in a leisure situation while it is being observed and evaluated his ability to regulate emotions, including his defense mechanisms (Fagulha, 1997).

On the other hand, this test makes dynamic ideas objective concerning the play as a transitional space between fantasy and reality (Winnicott, 1971, cited by Fagulha, 1997, p.6) using an explicit quotation system carefully developed with great acceptance. Moreover it is a proof that reveals situations and behaviors, either situation-specific or generalized, which are potentially worrying for the child, causing problems for parents, teachers and other children (Fagulha, 1997,2002, p.7).

"Caixa das emoções" refers to Emotional Intelligence which involves the ability to accurately perceive, assess and express emotions; the ability to perceive and generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge and the ability to regulate emotions promoting emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

The first performance based instrument for Emotional Intelligence assessment commercially released was Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS, Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 1997, as cited in Franco, 2003). It is an instrument composed by twelve tests grouped into four classes or "branches": Identification, Use, Understanding and Management of emotions. "Caixa das emoções" is an instrument similar to the MEIS' first branch, Identification of emotions, which aims to assess if the subjects are able to identify the emotional content in different stimuli: faces, music, drawings and stories.

The third instrument to be implemented in the present study, the children's book "Sobre os amigos", has been chosen taking into account the cognitive and emotional component that involves and encourages in the infant universe. Bearing in mind that this is not a standardized instrument we've appealed to its validation by experts in the areas of Psychology and Literature.

This is a story of the friendship between a child and an elephant. They play together; they share their happiness, their sadness and their secrets. However, it's not possible to be together all the time and when one of them goes away, the other feels himself alone and sad. By the end it is highlighted that when two real friends meet again, it's like they have never been separated.

Whatever our age is, only a story in line with the principles underlying our thinking has the power to persuade us. If it is so for adults, obviously it is for the child whose thinking remains animist until puberty (Bettelheim, 1976).




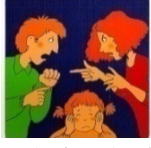
Stories may be a privileged strategy for children to work their emotions and understand others' emotions. For Branco (2001), "the literature allows us to give everybody a voice, the invisible and excluded ones, supporting the understanding of their reasons and emphasizing, simultaneously what is eternal in man, making it possible to overcome differences (p.255).

According to Johnson-Laird and Oatley (2006) literature can foster emotions since the reader identifies himself with the protagonist and resists antagonists and may also lead us to express an emotion for a character depending on the features that the author impresses, besides that the emotions raised by the books also depend on our memories.

3.5 Presentation of results and their analysis

By applying the "Caixa das emoções" test we could realize that, in general, children with ID identify emotional expressions in others, in a similar way that "normal" children do. Thus, there are meaningful differences in some pictures, in which it was evidenced a greater dispersion of identified emotions, mainly among 1st cycle children, whose results we present in the following table.

Table 1. Caixa das emoções.

Picture	“Normal” children 1st cycle	Children with ID 1st cycle	“Normal” children 2nd cycle	Children with ID 2nd cycle
 <p>Fig. 1 (3 in test) sadness</p>	sadness- 5 jealousy- 1 shame- 1 sulkiness- 1 worry- 1 loneliness- 1	sadness- 6 anger- 2 shame- 1 loneliness- 1	loneliness- 3 sadness- 2 rejection- 2	sadness- 5 loneliness- 1 shame- 1
 <p>Fig. 2 (4 in test) sadness</p>	fear- 6 sadness- 1 shame- 1 bad- 1	fear - 4 anger - 3 shame - 1 sadness - 1 doesn't know- 1	sadness- 3 fear- 2 shame- 1 regret- 1	sadness - 2 shame - 2 fear - 1 annoyance- 1 doesn't know – 1
 <p>Fig. 3 (8 in test) shame</p>	shame- 9 fear- 1	shame - 4 fear - 4 sadness - 1 doesn't know – 1	fear- 6 shame- 1	shame- 4 fear- 3
 <p>Fig. 4 (11 in test) sadness</p>	sadness - 5 fear - 2 anger - 1 regret- 1 annoyance – 1	sadness- 6 anger- 2 fear- 1 disappointment- 1	sadness- 6 annoyance- 1	sadness- 5 fear-2

The analysis of the table allows us to understand that the most obvious differences occur between the sample of the 1st cycle children and the sample of the 2nd cycle, by the reason that the children of the first group are more “diverse” identifying emotions, not being meaningful the difference in the answers of children with and without ID in both cycles. These results are consistent with those found in the previous study, strengthening the evidence that children with ID show ability in identifying emotions, even though, contrary to previous data, the children of this sample do not reveal difficulties in recognizing fear and anger, presenting also a wider range of identified emotions.

Children’s answers also suggest that the identification of emotions is probably associated with their relational and family experiences, once, for instance, in the 4th, 8th and 11th pictures the emotion varies between fear, shame, regret and sadness, this is, in some cases children identified emotions associated with self-punishment (fear, regret) and, in others, emotions associated with punishment by adults (fear).

“Era uma vez...”

By applying the Teresa Fagulha’s projective test “Era uma vez...” we obtained several answers and imagined stories, thereby allowing an analysis on the way each group of children describes emotions and the strategies they use to deal with them, particularly with situations that generate anxiety or pleasure.

This way, among “normal” children of the 1st cycle it is noteworthy that the majority, seven in ten, chose

scenes corresponding to reality while children with ID belonging to the same cycle chose mostly scenes corresponding to affliction (six in ten). Regarding to their favourite stories, the majority of “normal” children answered “Beach” and “School”, while the answers of children with ID were very diverse and alluding to almost all cards. Thus, four mentioned the card “Beach”, two mentioned the card “Nightmare”, two mentioned the card “School” and one chose the card “Birthday”. When questioned about the story they liked less, the majority of children on both groups answered “Parents’ discussion”.

Regarding to “normal” children of the 2nd cycle, the results are similar to those of the 1st cycle, being that the majority, four in ten, chose reality scenes. Among children with ID of the 2nd cycle the results were also very identical, with four in seven children choosing reality scenes and only two choosing affliction scenes, unlike what occurred with children from the 1st cycle. Also among children of the 2nd cycle it was evident that the card “Parents’ discussion” was the one that aroused a greater discomfort, being chosen by almost all children from both groups as the one they liked less. About their favourite stories, “normal” children chose mainly “Beach” and “Birthday”, while children with ID’s answers covered all cards, which led us not to verify a preference pattern.

According to these results we may state that for the group of children from the 2nd cycle, that is, older children, we did not verify meaningful differences in the way they describe the emotions underlying the scenes of the projective test, using mostly realistic strategies to deal with situations that generate anxiety. Contrary, children with ID of the 1st cycle, by choosing predominantly affliction scenes, reveal difficulties in cognitively mediate anxiety situations.

Children with ID also showed a greater dispersion in the selection of their favourite stories, not being possible to identify a socially logical or standard reason for their preferences. It is also important to refer that the sequences chosen by children with ID are far less logical when compared with “normal” children.

However we evidence a common pattern in the two groups of children which suggests that the situation of conflict between parents is the one which generates a greater discomfort and anxiety.

“Sobre os amigos”

By applying the test “Sobre os amigos”, a story about the friendship between a child and an elephant, we noted that some answers were identical between the groups of “normal” children and children with ID.

For most of the “normal” children the favourite part of the story was the last one, when the child meets the elephant again; and the part of the story they liked less was, for most of them, when the elephant left the boy alone. Among children with ID the preference was the part of the story where the characters played pretending to perform Little Red Riding Hood, while the part they liked less matched with “normal” children’s answers.

Regarding the questions “What made the little boy happy/sad?” the answers were similar in both groups, linking the elephant’s presence to the boy’s happiness and the elephant’s absence to the boy’s sadness

About the question “Why did the little boy draw the elephant’s picture in the swimming pool?” there was also uniformity in the answers of both 1st cycle’s groups, linking the picture to longing and friendship.

The last question “What are they both feeling when they’re lying on the grass?” lead to a wide range of answers. In the group of “normal” children of the 1st cycle the majority referred the answer to the value of friendship. In the group of children with ID only four referred the friendship as the answer, one referred that the characters were dreaming, one referred that the characters were thinking they should have fun, one answered they were sleeping, one answered they were thinking in important issues like employment and holidays and two said they didn’t know.

The 2nd cycle’s children answered similarly to the 1st cycle’s. This way, “normal” children considered the last part, when the characters meet again, the favourite one; and the child’s loneliness what they liked less. However, most of children with ID considered the favourite part the one where the elephant and the little boy are lying on the grass, two answered they liked the whole story, not electing a favourite part. About the part they liked less, most of these children said they have enjoyed all.

Regarding the questions “What made the little boy sad/happy?” the answers were identical in both groups, as happened with children of the 1st cycle.

To the question “Why did the little boy draw the elephant in the swimming pool?” children with ID answered analogously to “normal” children, leading the answer to longing and sadness caused by the elephant’s absence.

Finally the question “What are they both feeling when they’re lying on the grass?” both “normal” and children with ID of this school cycle emphasized the friendship and happiness that friends provide us.

The results with the application of this test indicate that, in general, individuals with ID live their emotions just like “normal” individuals do (Bernejo, 2006) even if they demonstrate a greater difficulty identifying the narrative structure as a sequential and integrated whole, according to the analysis that children with ID, attending the 1st cycle, did of the scene where the characters are lying on the grass.

3.6. Final considerations:

As Sovner and Hurley (1986) considered, individuals with ID present limitations to the awareness and understanding of their emotional experience and problems in the proper transmission of this information. These skills involve complex processes, namely the ability to mentally represent the emotion, by relating to the repertoire of emotional experiences and the ability to perform fine distinctions within the same emotional categories (Kang & Shaver, 2004, cited by Vaz 2009).

The findings of this study highlighted that the identification of emotions is clearly similar between individuals with and without ID, having been, nevertheless, identified some difficulties in the understanding and organization of coping strategies. This difficulty in managing in an adaptive way some situations which generate anxiety, explicit in the results of the projective test “Era uma vez...”, emphasizes the need to implement with these children an intervention program with the purpose of developing cognitive mediation skills in order to promote the adoption of more adaptive strategies of emotional regulation.

Like almost all empirical studies this one also presented some limitations including, perhaps, the number of subjects who have integrated the sample which was composed thirty-four children, whereas seventeen have mild intellectual disability and seventeen are “normal”. A study with a wider sample would be condition to provide these results more strength.

Since this is an undeveloped area in Portugal one of the major difficulties was the theoretical background about the emotional development in intellectual disability as well as the research of studies on this scope.

However this study may serve as the basis for the development of other research studies in different educational contexts. We may opine that a further evaluation and comprising other instruments could bring stronger results providing us the possibility of achieving more conclusions. A few topics for further research could imply the comparison between the identification, expression and regulation of emotions in teenagers with ID attending secondary school, by the fact that the age group corresponding to this scholar level includes individuals that face specific teenage problems. This fact often linked with emotional and interpersonal experiences complex and contradictories, may hinder or promote the emotional development in teenagers with ID. It would also be opportune a comparative study between the female and male genres with ID.

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