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# The relation between the emotional intelligence of parents and children

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## Abstract

This study aims to establish the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence of the children and that of their parents. We hypothesized that there is a direct correlation between the level of emotional development of children and parents. Two samples, one with 20 children and other with 20 parents participated in the study. The research was carried out during one school semester. Data were collected using an emotional intelligence test for parents and an observation grid for children. Our results confirm the hypothesis and highlight the relation between the emotional intelligence of parents and children.

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*Keywords:* emotional intelligence; emotional development; parents; children

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## 1. Introduction

The educational realities of the 21st century are showing the necessity to empower the educated individuals to develop that kind of competences which could be used in any domain of application and are successful in nature, regardless of age or social condition, namely the socio-emotional competences. Studies initiated at the beginning of the 90s have been underlined the fact that the emotional intelligence represents a potential that could provide success in life (Gardner, 2005; Gardner & Hatch, 1989; Goleman, 2001). The studies which refer to the modalities to educate the emotional intelligence point to the fact that the influence the parents have upon the emotional

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competences of their own children starts to manifest itself even from the first months of life (Gottman, Hooven, & Katz, 1994; Huessman, 1987; Thomas & Chess, 1988; Saarni, 1990; Brazelton, 1992; Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 2007; Segal, 1997). The first opportunity to develop elements of emotional intelligence appears during the child's first years of life, and this capacity continues to grow along the school education period. The emotional abilities that will be acquired later depend on those formed during the first years of life, and those capacities are the fundamental basis of learning. Some research results have proved that achievement in schools cannot be predicted as against certain child's behavior or the early capacity to read, but it is affected by the social and emotional biases: self-certainty and interest; whether the child knows what kind of behavior he is expected from and how to control wrong impulses; if the child is able to wait, follow instructions and request the teacher's support; if the child is able to express his needs when he or she is around other children (Brazelton, 1992). The same report states precisely the fact that all pupils having weak results in school are deprived of one or more of those elements of emotional intelligence, whether they may also have cognitive difficulties or not (Brazelton, 1992). The emotional learning starts from the first moments of life and goes on along the entire childhood. The first 3 or 4 years of life cover a period during which the child's brain reaches approximately two thirds of its dimension at maturity and evolves in terms of complexity more than ever. It's during this time that certain knowledge is acquired mostly than any time later, especially if we refer to the emotional kind of knowledge. All those little exchanges between parent and child have an emotional background and, when repeating those messages along the following years, the children develop a basis of emotional perspectives and their emotional capacity (Goleman, 2001). Along that period, powerful stress may affect the learning capacity of the brain and, even if there is some potential for recovery through later experiences, the impact may be profound (Brazelton, 1992). According to other authors, childhood represents a „*crucial chance*” towards shaping the emotional predilections of the individual, as the habits acquired during childhood are included in the synaptic networks of the neuronal architecture and they are difficult to change later (Goleman, 2001, p. 274). In order to illustrate the importance of emotional education in the parent-child relationship, we've decided to carry out a research meant to underline the relation between the emotional habits of parents (adults) and those of their children.

## 2. Objective and the hypothesis of the study

Under the circumstances where the specialty studies show the influence which the emotional habits of parents have upon the emotional development of their children, the investigating procedures have in view two objectives:

- to identify the level of emotional intelligence both of children and of their parents;
- to establish the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence of the children and that of their parents.

While following these objectives, we've set as an aim the testing of the hypothesis according to which there is a direct correlation between the level of emotional development of children and that of their parents.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Procedure

The research was carried out during one school semester and it was oriented towards the following main direction: the identification of the level of parents' emotional development values; the identification of the level of their children's emotional development values; the establishment of a correlation between the parents' and children's emotional development values. Data were collected using an emotional intelligence test for parents and an observation grid for children.

### 3.2. Participants

The target-population aimed at by our investigation is represented by children attending the school year 2011-2012, in the pre-school group at a kindergarten of Brașov and by their parents. The group of pre-school children include 20 children with ages between 4 and 7 ( $M=6.72$ ,  $SD=0.70$ ). With the view of setting up the target population

made of the pre-school children's parents, we took as a guide the criterion of the parent who most looks after the child, so the one who has a greater educational influence. The investigated adult subjects have ages ranging between 26 and 58 years old ( $M=34.45$ ,  $SD=6.26$ ).

### 3.3. Measures

In order to identify the emotional intelligence values of parents and children we used two categories of methods and instruments of investigation, some of them destined to the investigation of parents' emotional intelligence values, others to determine the children's emotional development values. In order to investigate the parents' emotional development values we used as a psycho-pedagogical research method the cross-examination based on a test. The investigation tool used to determine the parents' emotional intelligence values consists in a test to determine the emotional intelligence quota (QE). The test was adapted after a similar instrument of Mihaela Roco and presents ten scripts, each provided with four variants of answer (Roco, 2004), from which the subject picks one.

The research method used to identify the children's emotional development values was the observation, and as a registration instrument for the results of the observation we chose to use the observation grid which was developed based on the QE identification test – the version for children (Roco, 2004). The observation grid includes also ten scripts (like the test used for parents) adapted to answer the concrete realities of the group of pre-school children and, in the same time, to respect the initial versions of the scripts, in order to keep the equivalence between the scripts included in the test for children and those included in the adult version. In this way, we ensure that the data collected from parents and children are comparable. We resorted to this kind of tool to register the observation results as it proved to be the most efficient and relevant one, if we consider the subjects' age and psycho-individual characteristics. The records were made at the end of semester, and each child had the opportunity to go over scripts that were at least resembling, if not identical, to those presented in the observation grids.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Results regarding the parents' emotional development values and those of their children

In order to identify the parents' emotional development value, we resorted, during a first stage, to the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained after we applied the test meant to determine the emotional intelligence value for the adults. The scores obtained by the adult subjects are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The emotional intelligence (EI) value for parents

Score for EI	Frequency	Percent%
20	1	5%
40	1	5%
45	1	5%
60	3	15%
65	3	15%
70	2	10%
80	3	15%
85	3	15%
100	2	10%
110	1	5%

For a relevant interpretation of these results, we have to make clear the fact that the significance of the global sense of the emotional development values is the following: less than 100 points - below the average; 100 – 150

points – the average; 151 – 199 – over the average; 200 – exceptional. According to the interpretation of the global significance of the emotional development values, all the emotional development values belonging to the investigated adult subjects are under the average or they are average.

We proceeded similarly in order to identify the children's emotional development values, so we resorted to the analysis and interpretation of data registered in the behavior observation grids. The scores obtained by the child subjects are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The emotional intelligence (EI) value for children

Score for EI	Frequency	Percent%
40	1	5%
45	3	15%
60	2	10%
65	3	15%
80	3	15%
85	2	10%
95	1	5%
100	2	10%
105	1	5%
120	1	5%
140	1	5%

The explanation of the children's emotional development values reveals firstly a modifying aspect of their presence, the lowest value being 5 (it is the case of a boy who is benefiting from psychological and speech therapy) and reaches the value of 140, the highest score obtained by any of the subjects, whether they may be adults or children. The best score obtained by one of the child subjects (140) goes near the significance threshold below the average (150) regarding the interpretation of the global sense.

#### 4.2. The results regarding the relationship between the level of emotional development of children and of their parents

The second objective of the research aimed at establishing a relationship between the parents' and the children's emotional development values. The relationship between the parents' and the children's emotional development values was determined through calculating the value of Bravais – Pearson ( $r$ ) correlation coefficient. The result analysis showed the fact that, for the investigated population, there is a direct and strongly significant correlation ( $r = 0.59$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In these circumstances, the hypothesis of our research, namely that *there is a direct correlation between the children's and parents' emotional development level*, is confirmed.

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

The results of our study reflect the overwhelming impact which the emotional intelligence has upon the emotional development of the children. Our results are in line with previous studies that indicate the main impact of the parents' emotional development on the emotional life of their children (Kolb, 1989; Achenbach, Howell, 1989; Solomon, 1988; Hamburg, 1992; Goleman, 2001). The relationship parents – children is defining for the harmonious development of the children's personality, the parent being one of the main educators who traces on an extraordinary extent the emotional and relational path of the child today, and future adult. A frequently mentioned concept lately is that of the *socio-emotional deficiency*. Relative conceptual delimitations try to ease the understanding of the concept and also to reveal both the ways of efficient intervention and the moment when those

should be implemented in order to produce the expected results. The alarming increase in the number of children who express emotional disorders has multiple causes. Upon many of these cases we cannot intervene, yet we could, as trainers, extend our development work not only on children, but also on their parents. The defining equation towards a harmonious building and development of the human personality, the equation heredity-environment-education respectively, in which heredity used to represent the premises, the environment used to stand as a factor and education showed up as a condition, is not capable to reflect the contemporary reality any more. The parent ceased to embody a factor regarding his child's education, as he turned up to be a condition. The access to some quality education depends on the parent's potential and attitude. Thus, if we aim at getting results on the level of the child educated, we have to work first on the attitude of the adult educated, the child's educated parents.

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