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Emotional Education for Personal Growth in the Early Years

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This article offers a proposal related to early childhood emotional education. It is in line with Erikson's (1959) ideas surrounding psychosocial development and his theory of attachment and social referencing, Bridges' (1932) emotional development scheme, and Rogers' notion related to "acceptance" of emotional complexity toward healthy development. This proposal is reinforced with approaches from Winnicott (1986) and Kohut (2009), who demonstrate that children's emotional education is indeed a process of self-consciousness development through interaction with their primary caregiver(s). These approaches demonstrate that early childhood emotional education is really a process related to children's development of self-consciousness through interaction, or lack thereof, with their primary caregiver(s). We coin our approach "emotional integration," which is conceptualized as a response to the dominant "emotional regulation" narrative. While emotional regulation focuses on behavioral and structured routines for facing diverse emotional situations, emotional integration is centered on interpersonal relationship improvements in different emotional contexts. For the emotional regulation approach, the child regulates her behavior depending on the primary caregiver's reactions. In emotional integration, the child acquires certain dispositions toward the self, starting from her interaction with her caregiver. In small children, caregiver behavior certainly has a determining role. For the emotional regulation approach, the caregiver tries to solve possible problems in behavior, whereas for emotional integration, the caregiver seeks to develop inner processes of personal growth through the child's interaction with the other.

Public Significance Statement

This study offers a new proposal regarding children's emotional education and is based on Erikson's psychosocial development, attachment theory, and social reference, Bridges' emotional development, and Rogers' notions, alongside Winnicott and Kohut's approaches. It points toward a kind of interaction between the infant and his primary caregiver that focuses on emotional integration instead of emotional regulation, which allows for the infant's formation of self-consciousness and healthy emotional growth.

Keywords: emotional education, education, early childhood and emotional development

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Human development literature considers childhood the fundamental stage for educational development. Those early years generally focus on acquiring healthy routines through which the child regulates her own behavior through interactions with her primary caregiver (Sander, 1977). This article, however, takes a different position by exploring an educational alternative that starts with the knowledge of the child's direct reality and its effect on development during the rest of the maturation processes that take place in infancy (Blair & Razza, 2007), which are relevant for later stages of the life cycle (Bodrova, 2008).

In the following text, we introduce the authors of reference for this proposal at the same time that we outline our proposal, specifically focusing on children's personal development. This development is understood as a state of interpersonal improvement resulting from initial processes of intrapersonal integration in infancy (including emotional, cognitive, and moral aspects). These processes lead to a mature state that flourishes depending on the relationships established between infants or between infants and adults.

To better understand our proposal, let us first start with the example of a common family situation between a mother and her 2-year-old child that requires resolution. *The child is playing, and her mother stops the play to feed her at the established time. The child starts to cry and throws a tantrum.* What is the parent to do in this situation? Two typical solutions immediately arise: (a) Let the child play and forget the food, or (b) make the child eat and forget the play. This second option admits two variations: (2.1) The mother does not pay attention to the child's cries, but rather focuses on feeding. This generates some tension, but the mother wins. (2.2) The mother interacts with the child's emotional state and starts playing with him to calm him down and then moves on to feeding him.

From our point of view, these three options all have something in common. In each, they face a problem that could be summarized as follows, "The child needs to learn certain routines, but refuses," which necessitates resolution. In our view, focusing on solving the problem is an educational mistake that emerges from these two options (three alternatives). It is easy for a mother to conceptualize the situation as a "struggle of wills"; the child wills to continue

playing, and the mother wills him to eat because she is focused on the child's resistance and emotional state evidenced in crying. With this case as an explanatory framework, we develop an alternative intervention proposal, which we present initially and then, at the end of the article, more specifically regarding the situation in question.

Erikson's Proposal of Development in the First 2 Years of Life and His Attachment Theory

In 1963, Erikson pointed out that, in the first 2 years of life, children have certain experiences that engender in them an attitude of either basic trust or mistrust (Erikson, 1963). If children feel that their caregiver—usually their parent(s)—recognizes and satisfies their essential needs, they grow up with a basic sense of trust. But if they find that their needs are not met, or that only some of them are (e.g., only the physical, but not the psychological ones, such as playing, caressing, etc.), then they lean more toward distrust that manifests itself in the type of care they lacked. Both basic trust and basic mistrust exist on a spectrum and can be measured.

Undoubtedly, contemporary psychology continues to develop attachment theory after confirmation of its original formulation in the 1970s and 80s (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1982). A child's emotional attachment, with which he or she feels safe and protected by her primary caregiver(s), enables her to survey the world under the paradigm of exploratory curiosity (Carson, 2012; Domhardt, Münzer, Fegert, & Goldbeck, 2015; Glaser, 2014; Hong & Park, 2012; L'Ecuyer, 2014).

The impact that children's relationship with their caregivers has on themselves is now well understood and supported by evidence. Indeed, many have found that it affects children's considerations of the world and their emotional states (Atzil et al., 2017; Bornsteina et al., 2017; Morales et al., 2017; Pratt, Goldstein, Levy, & Feldman, 2017; Zhang, Chen, Deng, & Lu, 2014); it also helps to form children's "personal premise system" (Berghout Austin, Godfrey, Weber, Martin, & Holmes, 1991) and even affects their brain structure (Silk, Redcay, & Fox, 2014) and epigenome (Provençal & Binder, 2015), which is clearest in pathological cases (de Rosnay, Cooper, Tsigaras, & Murray,

2006; Pelaez, Virues-Ortega, Field, Amir-Kiaei, & Schnerch, 2013).

In keeping with authors such as Pittman, Keiley, Kerpelman, and Vaughn (2011), we propose a consideration of the possibility of complementarity between these two models. Bowlby's, 1982 model offers Erikson's model inclusion of various secure and insecure attachment representations that have implications for the implementation of interpersonal strategies in life cycle stages that follow childhood; on the other hand, Erikson's model offers Bowlby's model diverse social contexts for each development stage, in which various secure representations can be generated. In addition, we discover that, to understand anything, we must first refer to the child's relationship with her primary caregiver. This implies that the child trustingly assumes whatever her primary caregiver presents to her. For instance, if the person in charge hands a ball to a child, she holds the ball in a relationship of trust and will not see the ball as a hostile object. The child projects onto objects the relationship of trust or mistrust she has with her primary caregiver, thus engendering concrete relational styles. This social interaction defines the type of access the child has to the world, even when she is alone.

A dynamic of trust causes the child to perceive novelty with astonishment and awakens her desire to learn new things, whereas a dynamic of mistrust causes the child to perceive newness with a certain suspicion and insecurity and causes her to immediately search for new ways to feel protected and safe. Therefore, we can initially conclude that the child's meaning and intentional approaches are related, and after accepting this premise, we define two different procedures for approaching reality as follows (Figure 1).

A relationship of trust between the primary caregiver and child promotes an approach of

wonder, which encourages the child to search for knowledge and promotes her will to learn because she feels secure. A relationship of mistrust between the primary caregiver and child promotes a control approach, engendering fear in the child and a search for ways to master reality toward self-protection because the child does not feel safe. Secure attachment results in the child relinquishing the need for control; for example, children who live in secure attachment do not exert control over their peers but instead develop close relationships with them (Park & Waters, 1989).

In short, the following three aspects not only represent meeting points between these two theories but also serve as arguments for our proposal. First, the life cycle period (childhood) described by both proposals gives similar importance to the caregiver; on the one hand, Bowlby, 1982 and Ainsworth understood the caregiver as determinant in the establishment of secure versus insecure relationships, where, on the secure end of the spectrum, the infant feels cared for and assisted, which allows her to explore their reality. This is certainly comparable to Erikson's description of caregivers' care and assistance as oriented toward trust or mistrust in the infant. Second, the development of the way in which the infant understands her surroundings results from the desire to explore/learn or search for situational control; both are a result of the caregiver's attachment style (the result of attachment history) with regard to the child, which causes the infant to project this style in future relationships. In short, the caregiver determines the way in which the infant interprets new environments of greater social complexity. Third, and probably most important, both authors recognize that the attachment style and the psychosocial transfer produced in the relationship (between caregiver and infant) have interpersonal results that feed the child's beliefs about the self, others, and the world. This has serious implications for the way in which the infant relates in the future.

Social Referencing Theory

In the 1980s, psychology literature began to explore the power of the affective bond between children and their primary caregiver(s), showing how children learn a particular view of their context depending on how their mother or father

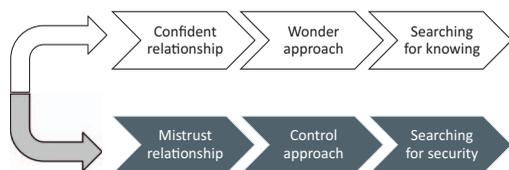


Figure 1. Two personal relationship styles related to two ways of approaching reality. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

understand the world, as well as in terms of the quality of the relationship(s) between them. Children understand the emotional meaning of affection that their primary caregivers show them not as a mere modulator, but as an aid or an impediment that permits or hinders their development (Tronick, 1989).

Going deeper into this idea, researchers have found that communication in early childhood fundamentally relates to the child-caregiver-object visual triangle, by which children learn the meaning of reality and which also guides their behavior based on their primary caregivers' facial expressions. This phenomenon has been coined as "social referencing" (Walden & Ogan, 1988).

Trevarthen (2005) took up attachment theories, arguing that it is not just a matter of feeling safe but also the basis from which a child gets to know the world and assigns meaning to reality. Therefore, the infant's behavior is not a mere "reflection or mirror" of brain motor processes but rather the result of emotional-sympathetic negotiation (Trevarthen, 2005, p. 59). In other words, intersubjectivity constructs meaning and emotional experience (Trevarthen, 2005, pp. 66–71). This meaning jumps across the intergenerational divide (Trevarthen, 2005, p. 61), which is why the author propounds that it "goes beyond concerns with" (Trevarthen, 2005, p. 71) the search for well-being, regulating activity and stress levels.

Accordingly, we can uncover the importance of constructing meaning from an interpersonal encounter with language (emotional in this case; Trevarthen, 2005, p. 71). More explicitly, it first corresponds to the interpersonal encounter as a source of significance, which consequently enables an emotional state. This interpersonal encounter requires both the child and primary caregiver's bidirectional intentions, as well as the latter's emotional expression. This encounter condenses for the child her emotional experience.

Studies on social referencing also reveal that, for human beings, the social sphere is not just the environment in which learning takes place; it is not another modulator just because learning happens in that context. That explanation lacks consistency because, beyond it, the social sphere provides meaning. As we know, to help a young child learn a new language, someone must be present (Kuhl, Tsao, & Liu, 2003);

otherwise, the child treats isolated sounds as noise and finds them to be meaningless. For young children, things are not what they are in themselves; instead, their meaning is taken or "borrowed" from adults' emotional reactions. This is the most obvious basis of social referencing in situations of ambiguity (Klinnert, Emde, Butterfield, & Campos, 1986; Mireault et al., 2014; Pelaez, Virues-Ortega, & Gewirtz, 2012), although it could be argued that most things that appear for the first time are largely ambiguous. Another important issue is that social referencing does not just provide emotional meaning to the world of objects or events but also does so for other people (Feinman & Lewis, 1983) assuming the emotional meaning that an adult's emotional state gives off (Murray et al., 2008; Moses, Baldwin, Rosicky, & Tidball, 2001; Repacholi & Meltzoff, 2007).

As a whole, it is encouraging that social referencing gives meaning to objects, events, and personal relationships. This issue is gaining relevance in neuroscience because meaning emerges as a result of these processes (Clark-Polner & Clark, 2014). When the caregiver and child share an intentional activity (staring at each other, singing together, etc.), both brains experience bidirectional synchronization in the frontal region (Leong et al., 2017). All this influences the brain's configuration such that a predetermined or default mode of thinking may/can be created for understanding the world, a worldview or a belief system.

Drawing conclusions from Erikson—including attachment and social referencing theory—all this seems to lead to the fact that children do not neutrally access the world; rather, they project the quality of their relationship with their caregiver onto the world, as well as the meaning that their caregiver assigns to a shared object. Children learn the meaning of reality through the emotional expression that their primary caregiver exudes. We could say that the parent or primary caregiver "lends" his mind to the child, clarifying that, in this case, we understand "mind" as the sense in which he understands the world. This equates to saying that the child knows the world through the representation her parent or primary caregiver offers her; hence, the child "acts with her primary caregiver's mind." The following figures collect and summarize the ideas presented earlier (Figures 2).

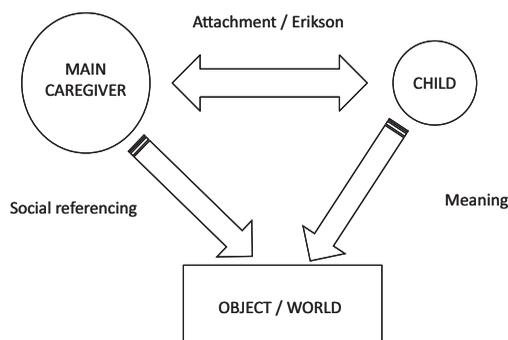


Figure 2. Relationship between Erikson's attachment theory and social referencing theory.

When faced with novelty in a situation, such as when a primary caregiver shows something new to a child, she will instantly react by staring at her caregiver to glean the meaning of the new object. Then, in accordance with the quality of the relationship (attachment theory and Erikson's idea of the trust–mistrust spectrum) and the emotional meaning that the caregiver gives to the object (social referencing), the child assigns meaning and significance to the object as reflected in the emotional experience therein. The world as a whole, and any one object in particular, initially holds no meaning for the child. Consequently, the child finds meaning thanks to the quality of the personal relationship with her primary caregiver (as Erikson and attachment theory points out) and thanks to her primary caregiver's emotional expression in light of the object (as social referencing tells us).

Before applying this proposal to emotional education, we turn to better understanding how emotional development occurs, and, to do so, we rely on Bridges' research as well as Rogers' reference to acceptance of reception. Herein, we will add other authors who encompass and give meaning to these theories when applied to the child's inner self so that she might grow through creativity rather than an established emotional regulation regime.

Psychological and Emotional Development

For authors such as Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (2018), an infant's psychological development can be understood sequentially in three phases as follows: (a) *normal autistic phase*

(first weeks to first month after birth). Although the relationship between a newborn and his environment is minimal, he responds to (internal or external) stimulation instinctively, while the caregiver meets his physiological needs, which outweigh psychological ones. (b) *Normal symbiotic phase* (2 to 5 months): The infant must adapt to the environment that surrounds him through his caregiver, as his rudimentary self is not sufficiently structured to face the various environmental demands. M. S. Mahler (1974) referred to this phenomenon as *symbiosis*, that is, a fused state or interdependent psychobiological bond between the caregiver and infant that supplements the infant's rudimentary and undifferentiated self. (c) *Separation–individualization phase* (5 months to 2 years): The infant shows a growing ability to recognize others, especially his caregiver, to gradually inspect the world and move away from the caregiver perspective through two interrelated processes—separation, which entails intrapsychic awareness of separation, and individualization, which allows for the infant's distinctive and unique individuality to emerge.

These three phases reveal that processes of biological and psychological birth are different over time. While biological birth implies greater circumscription and speed in terms of the physiological acts involved, for psychological birth—or the separation–individualization process, as Mahler's psychological development theory called it—intrapsychic acts become evident later and are slower to develop (Ritvo, 2018). Thus, the separation–individualization process is another way of saying that the child gradually acquires awareness of the self (which he obviously does not know how to account for). However, contrary to Mahler's consideration, and supported by studies with evidence from intrauterine stages, fetuses with a developed brainstem show psychological acts directed to action outside of mere reactivity (DeLafield-Butt & Gangopadhyay, 2013; DeLafield-Butt & Trevarthen, 2015). Thus, we believe that elements of a proto-self are already present in intrauterine stages.

Regarding infants' emotional development at the age of two, there are four relevant aspects to consider (Greenspan, 2007a): (a) The child's connection to her caregivers is characterized by a balance between basic dependence and autonomy, between initiative and capacity for self-

organization at the behavioral level (“crawlers” who go get what they want; Sroufe, 2005; Theisen & Erikson, 2007); (b) the mood and feelings that predominate are more diversified, organized, and stable, together with greater performance of tasks associated with recognition of emotions compared with emotional perspective-taking tasks (Downs, Strand, & Cerna, 2007; Wellman, Fang, & Peterson, 2011); (c) regarding the variety, depth, and adequacy of feelings, the presence of feelings such as security, curiosity, and the need for exploration is evident. Likewise, the child tends to experience self-reference (the child incorporates “the self” into language), possessiveness (“mine”), and negativism (“no” to whatever he does not want). Fear also often arises in situations where the caregiver momentarily detaches (Groh, Fearon, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Roisman, 2017; Malik & Marwaha, 2018); (d) at this stage of development, the presence of emotional states expressed in the infant’s behavior, play, and verbalization is observed through development of the capacity to organize behavior in more complex causal chains that demonstrate her interests and pleasures (Tomasello & Carpenter, 2007). The child expresses themes of love, curiosity, exploration and protest, anger, denial, and jealousy, all in an organized way. Toward the end of the second year, capacities emerge that integrate themes that reflect love-hate and passivity-activity polarities, and the child’s first symbolic capacities also emerge (Greenspan, 2007b). All of these milestones demonstrate the child’s gains in terms of expressiveness in her emotional repertoire.

In line with these states of emotional polarity and contrary to common belief, authors such as Katherine Bridges (1932) postulated that, when we are born, we lack all basic emotions (joy, sadness, fear, disgust, and anger) and only inherit a capacity for basic excitability. Bridges assumed that we are able to recognize the child’s differentiation of two emotional situations if she uses different bodily expressions. That is, if something disgusts, scares, or hurts her, and she demonstrates the same bodily reaction, we can assume that she does not yet distinguish between disgust, fear, and pain. Bridges observed that, at birth, children react with the same corporal expression to every event. Soon after, however, they learn to differentiate unpleasant from pleasant situations, but,

in that development stage, their differentiation and emotional knowledge displays itself as a simple duality between the pleasant and unpleasant. For example, a child displays the same corporal expression after being satiated or after feeling her mother’s caress because she cannot yet distinguish them. To varying extents, other authors also followed Bridges’ approach (Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989; Jack, Garrod, & Schyns, 2014). From it, we can conclude that a child must learn what an inner emotional state is, which she discovers through social relationships.

As Bridges’ research developed, she found that a baby learns to distinguish different unpleasant situations more clearly and precisely than pleasant ones because her expressive corporal repertoire becomes more specialized according to diverse emotional situations. To the extent that children relate everything they have experienced and learn about emotional diversity, their ability to differentiate and identify emotional situations will emerge, and their development/growth will simultaneously take place, meaning that, integration, differentiation, identity, and growth occur together through children’s emotional reality. Camras (2011) summarized this idea as follows: “The data suggest that as development proceeds, infants responses become differentiated, and their integration during an emotion episode will reflect contextual factors as much as the identity of the emotion” (Camras, 2011, p. 142). A similar process occurs with the development of bodily and verbal languages; children achieve a relatively high level of bodily expressiveness, although their verbal expression remains at simple duality (good and bad). Just as children develop expressive bodily capacity, they must undergo the same process in the verbal realm, although of course the existence of language opens up more complicated processes (Lewis, 2007).

Toward an Educational Proposal

To offer an emotional education proposal centered on the family, we will start by connecting Erikson’s attachment and social referencing theory with Bridges’ and Roger’s theories.

In short, a state of basic trust permits infants to initiate on a path of differentiation in a way that is much more in line with reality because

they do not approach reality with excessive caution. Amazement does not seek to control but rather to learn about and assume reality as it is. We could say that amazement facilitates an involuntary—but at the same time intentional—approach and respectful knowledge of the world. “Involuntary intentionality” seeks to know (intentional), but without trying to control (involuntary). On the other hand, a situation of basic distrust leads infants to approach the world from an attitude of suspicion rather than amazement; their search for knowledge will therefore be intentional as they try to learn about and assume reality in order to control it and feel safe. Thus, in the end, basic trust promotes an encounter with reality as it is, setting aside any intention of changing it, which is very different from an attitude of basic mistrust.

As the identification path goes forward, it is important to note that emotions are not a mere affective reaction to stimulus, but rather a crystallized or condensed version of a whole bodily, intentional, emotional, social, and cognitive experience. Emotion is defined, therefore, as a condensed version of the understanding of one’s personal experience within the world and a social network (Jack et al., 2014).

As previously indicated, a child identifies and gives meaning to reality in terms of the relationship she has with her primary caregiver. A child uses her primary caregiver’s behavioral reactions to identify the emotional meaning of a variety of events or situations.

Studies in psychotherapy, such as the ones from Rogers (1961), have revealed that adults who developed in an atmosphere of mistrust do not recognize feelings as their own, nor can they conceptualize that these feelings are due to something happening in them. From their point of view, feelings are provoked externally and occur internally, but they do not possess them as such. Because this kind of person does not recognize himself as in possession of anything, he obviously cannot accept even the slightest responsibility or change, taking a defensive position and assigning blame elsewhere. These adults face their emotional world by going on the defense and constantly trying to control their feelings.

Certainly, Rogers spoke from the perspective of adult therapy, but he outlined necessary elements for a healthy life, which can be extended to the entire life span. We would also argue that

healthy living involves recognizing feelings as one’s own and not as merely awakened “from the outside.” When recognizing emotions for what they are, a person is thus able to take responsibility for his actions and then act on the matter.

On the contrary, Rogers pointed out that when someone feels welcomed and experiences a trusting relationship, he gradually discovers that emotions do not simply occur or take place inside one’s self, but that they belong to him. He begins to consider them as signals that refer to the complexity of personal life and, through them, can discover the world of meaning and lived reality, while recognizing his own experiences through, quite often, conflicting feelings.

In this case, emotions no longer need to be controlled. They are fine as they are, without need for modification or manipulation, that is, on their own, because they speak to the complexity of one’s life and, starting from them, one can grow in autonomy. Denying or controlling an emotion literally prevents growth and self-knowledge, which leads to situations that do not align with reality. The point is not to control but rather to assume and accept emotions to understand and learn about one’s self and reactions.

In adult therapy, upon uncovering complexity, the patient discovers that emotional reality itself compels him take a personal position in his life, which enables him to face the larger question of what kind of person he wants to be or become. The answer to this question is found through defining the type and quality of interpersonal relationships therein. Rogers made it clear that a patient cannot undergo this process before establishing a diminished climate of interpersonal reception, which permits the patient to accept and recognize his complex reality. This requires that the patient be capable of perceiving that the therapist admits his emotional reality without trying to change or modify it. This reception enables the patient to embrace and be open to his complexity and reality, without which growth is impossible. This brief sketch outlines a dual perspective in terms of emotional education that coincides with two dominant approaches concerning the emotional sphere, that is, emotional regulation focused on control and emotional integration focused on reception.

One of them can be identified as “emotional regulation,” which is the prevailing approach

(Gross, 2014; Vohs & Baumeister, 2011). The widespread use of the term “self-regulation” makes it clear that many consider it the dominant term for human development proposals and the objective of education, as part of a terminological universe that coincides in its absolute reference to the “self.” It undoubtedly rests on the psychological process of the will, which reveals a powerful “self” that dominates the environment and seeks to be independent (Burman, Green, & Shanker, 2015). Emotional regulation has typically been developed in the area of problem resolution or avoidance since it is used as one of the various behavioral strategies to prevent certain stimuli or control certain behavior (Lengua, 2002). As a whole, this proposal seeks to identify in order to control; it aims to identify emotion and to channel it whenever it is considered disruptive. Following this idea, emotions happen within the person, but are always meant to be external to subjectivity because an external stimulus is thought to control the emotion. Thus, emotion is not to be confused with a veridical perception obtained through encounters with the external world. Moreover, it often proposes an elimination of the given stimulus, or, when that is not possible, practitioners of this approach are meant to develop psychological resources to increase distance relative to the stimulus.

When presenting Erikson’s attachment and social referencing theories, the importance of the intention’s quality comes to fore. Thus, it is important to pay attention to the intentionality of emotional regulation. In the family environment and with children, this approach to emotional control takes place with the control of stimuli and internal reactions while the stimulus is present. The mentality with which the situation and the associated intentionality is addressed corresponds to “problem-solving,” which sees everything prestimuli as fine and everything poststimuli as a new situation that causes trouble, which requires intervention to somehow recover the previous stability. This kind of education is aimed at avoiding problems, in the face of which the previous balance is sought. In this way, everything appears to be in order, but focusing on education aimed at problem avoidance (e.g., a tantrum at the supermarket) does not amount to educating for development.

The question here is not whether emotional regulation is useful for solving problems. In fact, Lengua’s work (2002) demonstrates its short-term utility. Rather, we intend to reflect on whether emotional regulation’s intentional approach fosters children’s growth, which implies learning the internal complexity of emotions, welcoming them and facing up to one’s personal situation beyond the problem itself.

The approach to emotional education discussed herein—namely, emotional regulation—ignores the complex way in which emotions emerge, as described earlier and as Bridges pointed out because it attributes emotion to a stimulus and assumes Erikson’s model of basic mistrust, which leads the person to seek to control of her surroundings. Bridges helped us understand that emotion does not arise through stimulation because a stimulus’s significance depends on the child’s cognitive, social, and experiential development, and, without knowledge of that complex process, the reason for a behavior remains known (e.g., the reason behind a tantrum in the supermarket). Emotional regulation also contradicts Rogers’ indications because a child does not recognize what he or she has not accepted and will only accept it if her primary caregiver first demonstrates acceptance.

The alternative approach, coined here as “emotional integration,” follows Erikson’s line of basic trust and considers the emotional world’s complexity in accordance with Bridges, along with Rogers’ growth process and social referencing theory. Accordingly, emotions are the concentration or crystallization of a state in life at a specific moment. With trust, one is amazed by lived and unknown emotional realities, but one does not feel the need to control them because one does not perceive the world as hostile. This approach to emotional reality is much more respectful because it asks after what is happening in one’s self and the reason for the same: “Why is this happening?”

The desire to control emerges from a perceived threat rather than from a feeling of wonder. An approach starting with wonder allows us to understand by respecting our surrounding reality because it lacks any manipulative impulse. In this way, we discover the nuanced aspects of an emotion, as well as what gave rise to it. In the end, an approach starting from the perspective of control prevents and impedes

understanding. Reconciliation of an education based on emotional regulation and an education aimed at emotional integration is not advisable. Philosophically speaking, these positions are “*contrarias pero no contradictorias*” (meaning they are contrary, but not contradictory positions; Altarejos, 2004). They are “contrary” because one excludes the other, but they are “not contradictory” because both, rooted in very different frameworks, give rise to human proactivity.

For emotional integration, emotions do not constitute whims and are not driven by stimuli; following Bridges’ proposal, certain caregiving and interpersonal relationship styles explain the predominance of some emotions and not others in specific situations. From this perspective, we do not seek to solve problems, but rather rely on emotions to help us discover the complexity of a person’s situation, giving way to the growth associated with self-knowledge. The key is growing and getting to know oneself better because emotions, on the one hand, open the way toward self-knowledge, but, on the other hand, propel us toward taking a position whose execution requires a more global consideration and acceptance of the situation at hand.

In Rogers’ psychotherapeutic proposition, the term “acceptance” appears as the necessary psychological experience that initiates a path toward personal growth (Rogers, 1961, pp. 17, 82, 133). There is no way to bridge or avoid such an experience, without which the person becomes blocked (Rogers, 1961, p. 122). Acceptance represents personal growth both at the beginning of this process and in later stages, which is understood in the key of acceptance in the service of the self’s growth. Thus, the goal goes from fixing the problem to seeing it as an opportunity for personal growth (Rogers, 1961, p. 150).

Acceptance necessarily implies staving off the *immediate* desire to change reality as received because there are contrary dynamics involved throughout (Rogers, 1961, p. 21). Instead, it implies assuming reality “as it is” without pretending to fix anything (Rogers, 1961, p. 115). Feelings that thwart acceptance represent fear of one’s self (Rogers, 1961, p. 52).

The acceptance process is relational rather than individual. In fact, acceptance itself is preceded by the therapist’s acceptance (Rogers,

1961, p. 86); we could say that the therapist’s acceptance opens up the possibility of accepting one’s self (Rogers, 1961, p. 133) and entails a disposition toward the acceptance of others (Rogers, 1961, p. 86). If the therapist accepts the patient, then a true growth-enabling relationship will emerge (Rogers, 1961, pp. 34, 62). This relationship will be extended to the facts because they will be considered inimical (Rogers, 1961, p. 25). The social triangle found in early childhood then resurfaces, but instead of involving the caregiver-child-object, it becomes a therapist-patient-fact triangle. Although Rogers moved in the field of adult therapy, we believe that because he focused on personal growth, his ideas can be extended to the non-therapeutic realm as related to early childhood development.

Bearing in mind attachment and social referencing theories, together with Erikson’s healthy dynamic of trust and Rogers’ idea that we need to believe in the acceptance of emotional reality, the most coherent emotional education proposal corresponds to emotional integration because it takes place in a climate of acceptance, amazement, appreciation, and intensification of social relationships according to the child’s needs. This approach does not seek control, but rather looks for acceptance in the complexity of interpersonal relationships.

Just as a child needs her primary caregiver to introduce her to the outside world, the same is true of her inner world. A child’s emotional world initially surfaces as an enigma to the child herself, but if the primary caregiver accepts her emotional reality in an environment that safeguards the interpersonal relationship, then she can calmly approach her own emotional reality in a dynamic of wonder and openness to getting to know herself and growing in self-knowledge. Instead, if the primary caregiver reacts to a child’s emotional situation as if it were a misfortune or something in need of regulation (which usually happens when we seek to avoid problems), she will perceive her emotional situation as negative and disruptive and as something that needs to be controlled or eliminated, preventing self-knowledge and acceptance of reality.

If emotions originate in the complexity of social interaction and the multidimensional development that Bridges (and others like Barrett, 2017) demonstrated, then only amazement (and

not fear or shock) from the primary caregiver and the dynamics of emotional integration help the child grow in the knowledge of that complexity. Namely, if the primary caregiver gets close to his child by trying to negatively impose upon the child's emotional reactions, he will neither be able to access the complex world of the child's reality, nor will the child progress because she will seek control through conflict just as her primary caregiver does. The pair reacts with fear or suspicion toward reality, impeding their mutual relationship and personal growth.

Yet, when it comes to a child's emotional world, if the primary caregiver takes up an approach of knowledge, wonder, and dialogue to find out what is really going on (when the child is old enough), the child will assume that same approach and she will grow in self-knowledge. Successful interpersonal encounters are not possible through control, as a child that is frightened by her reality, because her caregiver is also fearful, tends to hide and minimize herself to avoid her primary caregiver's rejection.

Thus far, these two approaches can be summarized as follows (Figure 3):

In approaches related to emotional integration, the primary caregiver exudes confidence when faced with the child's emotional state; from there, he approaches the child's inner world with wonder. This, in turn, encourages the child to wonder and wish to discover more of her inner reality. Eventually, then, the child will master inner complexity. Regarding emotional regulation approaches, the primary care-

giver displays mistrust in the face of the child's emotional state. Consequently, the child approaches her inner world with suspicion, which leads the child toward controlling her inner reality, and thus impedes learning.

Winnicott and Kohut: Two Psychoanalysts in Defense of Emotional Integration

Winnicott (1986) clearly stated that, at birth, the child's foremost task is to form an image of her mother and of herself. Both images are formed in the same process (pp. 31, 33, 50, 130–131), which is done thanks to emotional integration (p. 28). Therein, feelings are experienced on their own (p. 82), and the newborn child is an active and creative agent (pp. 28, 40–49, 144). If the child does not perform said integration, she will possess a false image of herself (p. 33). From the moment of birth, the child begins to endure constant frustration (p. 22) because the reality that her mother is an independent entity is imposed on her and contrasted with a second principle—the satisfaction of needs. This game is fundamental (pp. 62–63). The mother's behavior should be such that she always demonstrates acceptance in the face of the child's diverse reactions. If the mother does not show this unconditional acceptance, the child will not be able to integrate a diversified emotional range, nor form a good image of herself or of her mother (p. 94) because the child needs to accept both as contrasting tendencies and will only do so if the mother does so (pp. 87–88, 95). For this reason, the mother

EMOTIONAL INTEGRATION



EMOTIONAL REGULATION



Figure 3. Two emotional education approaches. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

is meant to abandon exclusive focus on behavioral control (p. 120).

Winnicott realized that it is better to understand development starting from birth in terms of identity than as a game of competing forces (Winnicott, 1986, p. 26), whereas Kohut completed this idea by proposing that both healthy and pathological development are understood in a much more holistic way if we focus on the “I or me” (self). Kohut overcame Freud’s proposal of the “ego” as a place that reconciles and balances these forces (Kohut, 2009, pp. 41, 70–71, 75).

Kohut (2009) argued that understanding the self as a conglomerate of tensions or drives (drive is the term he used) sets up a pathological situation. He argued that the child is born into trust, and the primary caregiver confirms or denies that trust (p. 119). When denied, the person will end up being a “bag of drives” as a result of empathy failures (p. 122). When the mother interacts with the child, this interaction does not involve a mere balance of forces, but rather the formation of the self (p. 75); the caregiver’s reflection of what he perceives influences how the child is able to understand herself (p. 76). If the caregiver presents the child with a game of tensions that balance or channel into concrete behavior—either pleasing or correcting (p. 79–81)—the child forms an understanding of herself as reflected in that game. The child needs to form an image of herself as a self beyond a mere interplay of forces, but the child will do so only if she has an overall joyful experience (p. 81). Such an experience originates in the emotional experience that the caregiver transmits, with the tone of her voice and through other means (p. 86), to the child in everyday interactions (pp. 179–180).

Fundamentally, feelings arise as result of interaction (p. 87). Kohut also insisted that we not focus on conflict, but rather on the self (p. 95, 130). A sole focus on the forces in play fails to recognize that this game of forces is not the cause of bad experiences, but rather the effect of previous disintegration of the self (pp. 104–105, 116, 122). In addition, focusing on them and seeking their equilibrium entails cornering the child into a pathological structure that is far from the creative and joyful experience of the self that the child needs to develop healthily (p. 134).

Theory in Practice

Returning to our example of the child who wants to play and the mother who wants the child to eat, a third option based on our educational proposal emerges when the mother stops to think, “What is my child experiencing?” From birth, whenever a child faces a problem, she cries. She does not know the cause; she merely detects a problem and cries. Crying is like “sounding an alarm bell” to which the caretaker responds and tries to fix the situation. The child discovers that crying translates into a request for help. In our case, the child wills to play and sees that what she wants is not coming to fruition. This is called frustration. Feeling frustrated in that context is a new experience for the child. The child does not know what to do with this frustration; in fact, she does not even know that this experience is called “frustration.” She only notices his discomfort associated with frustration and “sounds the alarm bell,” asking for help with her cry.

The mother must ask herself, “How can I understand this situation?” If she understands that the child is experiencing frustration, she can focus on relating to the child so that the child learns to use frustration as an opportunity for growth. Frustration often comes up in life, and it is more important to learn how to channel frustration toward growth than it is to set up routines around meals. If the mother uses the child’s frustration to improve the interpersonal relationship between them, the child will replicate this dynamic in the future.

Following Kohut’s proposal, we focus on the “self” and not on the qualities of the self. That is, we focus on the person who cries and not on the cries of the person. The child then discovers that her mother is focused on her and not on her behavior. Obviously, learning that lesson takes time. After discarding Solutions 1 and 2, how might the mother intervene? The third option consists in the child discovering that her crying does not separate her from her mother and that her mother continues to interact with her as if she had not cried while feeding her. At the behavioral level, the third option and Option 2.2 are very similar. In fact, the child will likely fail to not notice any difference between the two, but the mother notes the difference. In the third option, the mother knows that the crying is not a problem, nor does she attempt to impose her

will. The situation is not understood as a “struggle of wills,” but rather as a request for help and she relates to her child as someone asking her for help. In Case 2.2, the mother understands the situation as a “struggle of wills”; the child wants to impose her will, and the mother has to juggle it all to achieve her end. The mother therefore notes the difference, which is reflected in *her* experience of stress, as Situation 2.2 is much more stressful and exhausting.

This article awakens many philosophical topics specifically about the formation of self-awareness, human action, and the integration of experience. We have eschewed a philosophical debate to focus on children’s lived experience, instead of asking adults to understand children’s world through adult philosophical categories.

On a philosophical level, the issue of the integration of experience can be placed along a spectrum. On the one hand, we find authors that start from the distance between the self and the world and seek to integrate experience, for example, Helm and Goldie (2006), Hume and Hume (2014), and Kant (2008). On the other hand, others are closer to a unified interpretation, such as the Gestalt theory (Metz-Göckel, 2015) or Whitehead and Griffin (1978) who start from the internal relationship.

On the one hand, we would like to set aside the debate about the emergence of the self because it is a very slow process that begins in utero (Delafield-Butt & Gangopadhyay, 2013; Delafield-Butt & Trevarthen, 2015) and comes to a close in adolescence (Erikson, 1968). But, on the other hand, we believe this article contributes to the philosophical debate regarding questions that even a toddler somehow asks after, such as, “What do I feel? Who am I? Who is the other? And how do I interact with my caregiver(s)?” In reality, they are all the same question. That is, the child answers them all at the same time—without forgetting that the child does not respond directly to these questions, but rather acquires a general, basic disposition common to all these questions that emerges during the maturation process.

This position is confirmed in psychoanalysis (Kohut, 1977; Winnicott, 1986) as its starting point is not the distance between the self and the world, and therefore integration is not seen as a problem to solve; rather it starts with the relationship between the mother and the child as a unit (M. S. Mahler, 1974). Thus, relational in-

tegration is assumed as the starting point, and experience confirms or denies that assumption. Confirmation of relational integration occurs through the integration of the child’s experience and action within the preexisting caregiver–child relationship.

Another philosophical debate that underlies this article revolves around the term intentionality. John Wilson (1972) studied various authors and unraveled the existing controversy over this term in the field of emotions. He believes the debate surrounding intentionality needs to clarify how the subject is understood, his activity and the object itself. In addition, he adds the question of whether every emotional situation is intentional (in regards to an object) or if the possibility of unintentional emotional states also exists. For his part, Goldie (2000, pp. 16–36, 62–71) indicates that intentionality attributed to emotion depends on how emotional reality is understood since, if we accept that understanding of a reality is implicit in emotional experience, the emotion’s intentionality could come from one of its constituent elements (the understanding implicit in the emotion) and not necessarily from the emotion in itself.

Resolving this debate goes far beyond the limitations of this article, although it certainly reveals that the emotional value of an object does not reside in the object, but rather in the interpersonal, child–caregiver encounter surrounding an object. In addition, as Kohut indicated, in the child’s emotional experience, the object to be understood is the child herself and not simply an outside reality. The child is in formation at the same time that she forms her understanding of the world and of herself, and it is difficult to separate these understandings. This greatly complicates the issue of intentionality because, historically, discussion of intentionality usually focuses on considering an object as external.

In addition to this complexity, it should be added that emotional experience is not closed, but rather is highly sensitive to reworking, even in adults, as Scruton studied in relation to aesthetic experience (Scruton, 1983, pp. 138–152). This is because meaning and value is first determined through an interpersonal relationship, such that, as interpersonal relationships evolve, it is to be expected that meaning and value also change.

Conclusion

As Bridges and social referencing theory propose, emotions do not result from one stimulus, but rather derive from life's complexity. As Rogers proposed, we can only understand our complexity by accepting it. As Erikson and attachment theory suggest, the child can only accept what her mother or primary caregiver accepts. Social referencing reveals that the child understands reality (including her own reality) in accordance with her primary caregiver's understanding of that same reality. As Winnicott (1986) proposed, only when the primary caregiver integrates the child's emotional situations can she also integrate them. As Kohut purported, nothing less than the construction of the self is at stake.

Good early childhood emotional education involves the caregiver welcoming the child's emotional reality at a personal level, which allows the child to develop an adequate inner disposition. Said caregiver uses everyday situations to communicate personal acceptance of the child, while teaching her how to live in a home without losing sight of the fact that the caregiver is ultimately teaching the child who she is (the self). We call this proposal "emotional integration" because its key point involves integrating emotional reality for the improvement of personal relationships.

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