Rinda Blom

Social work among primary-school children: promoting emotional intelligence

This article addresses important aspects of social work service-rendering to primary-school children in respect of emotional intelligence. The primary-school child is constantly confronted with developmental tasks, such as adapting to school and social activities. There is also an increasing global emphasis on the role of emotional intelligence skills in a child's adjustment. The focus of this article is on abilities and skills related to two components of personal emotional competence, namely self-awareness and emotional self-regulation, and one component of interpersonal emotional competence, namely empathy. It aims to provide guidelines for social workers in this regard.

Maatskaplikewerkhulpverlening aan skoolkinders in die primêre fase: die bevordering van emosionele intelligensie

Die artikel fokus op aspekte van belang in maatskaplikewerkhulpverlening aan skoolkinders in die primêre fase wat betref hul emosionele intelligensie. Dié skool-kind word konstant gekonfronteer met ontwikkelingstake soos om aan te pas by die skool en sosiale aktiwiteite. Daar is wêreldwyd toenemende klem op die belang van emosionele intelligensievaardighede wat betref die kind se aanpasssing in geheel. Die fokus in die artikel is op vermoëns en vaardighede met betrekking tot twee per-soonlike emosionele bevoegdheidskomponente, naamlik selfbewussyn en emosionele selfregulering, en een interpersoonlike emosionele bevoegdheidskomponent, naamlik empatie, ten einde riglyne aan die maatskaplike werker in dié verband te voorsien.

Dr B Blom, Dept of Social Work, University of the Free State, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300; E-mail: rindablom@ananzi.co.za

The cumulative stress of modern life makes emotional demands which children cannot necessarily meet in terms of their natural development (Shapiro 1997: xi). As early as 1990, Visser (1990: 1, 75) referred to the mental health crisis among children in South Africa as the result of socio-political circumstances and problems such as urbanisation, unemployment, broken families, poverty, riots, child abuse and molestation. During a recent workshop on wellbeing and poverty among children, it was reported that "poverty, unemployment and inequality appear to be increasing in South Africa" and that "children are particularly vulnerable in situations of poverty ... at least 45% of South African children live in absolute poverty" (Child Research Network Steering Committee 2003: 3). Enhancing the social functioning of those with special needs and the vulnerable was stated as one of the national goals of the *White Paper for Social Welfare* (1997), which recommended that preventative social welfare programmes must focus on high-risk groups which are vulnerable to specific problems, such as children and the youth. These programmes must also make provision for the needs of families in accordance with the various stages of the life cycle and should focus on prevention rather than cure (Department of Welfare 1997: 5, 9, 42).

Nowadays emotional intelligence is seen as playing an important role in an individual's successful adaptation to life. Academic and lay circles are becoming increasingly aware of the concept.[1] During middle childhood (from the ages of six to twelve years) the child is confronted with important emotional developmental tasks such as adapting to the school and to social activities as well as developing new communication skills. Children from birth to nine years have special needs in terms of their physical, mental, emotional, moral and social development.[2] Although many children move successfully through the developmental tasks of middle childhood, a growing number of children manifest emotional and behavioural problems for which they need assistance from social workers. Stone-McCown *et al* (1998: viii) note:

1   Cf Goleman 1995; Aronstam 1996: 48; McGarvey 1997: 72-3; Coetzee 1998: 12-3; Stone-McCown *et al* 1998: 3; Mayer *et al* 1999a: 396.
2   Cf Corey & Corey 1993: 51; Morris 1996: 310; Department of Welfare 1997: 42; Louw *et al* 1998: 326.

> In a time that society is wracked by crisis, it is critical that we pro-
> vide children tools to reach the roots of the problem; affective edu-
> cation is the opportunity to teach those skills.

Today's primary-school children should thus be afforded the oppor-
tunity to learn specific emotional intelligence skills by means of age-
appropriate social work service-rendering.

This article focuses on key aspects of social work with primary-
school children with regard to emotional intelligence: two components
of personal emotional competence, namely self-awareness and emo-
tional self-regulation, and one component of interpersonal emotional
competence, namely empathy.

2. Conceptualising emotional intelligence

Descriptions of the concept of emotional intelligence have altered seve-
ral times since it was first described in 1990, resulting in various
conflicting descriptions. In general, a distinction is made between
two groups of models for emotional intelligence, namely ability mo-
dels such as those of Mayer & Salovey (1997) and mixed models such
as that of Goleman (1995). Descriptions of the two groups of models
are based mainly on the identification of specific ramifications, do-
mains or components of emotional ability, which form part of the
concept of emotional intelligence (Mayer *et al* 1999a: 399-403).

Salovey & Mayer's (1990) research on the concept of emotional in-
telligence is, however, regarded as the first development of the
concept as an empirical research field (Mayer *et al* 1999a: 396). These
authors have since taken the lead in respect of the scientific develop-
ment of the theory and its measurement, and are closely linked to the
development of emotional intelligence as true intelligence (cf Ep-
stein 1998: 20; Hein 2000: 2).

In this article the ability model of Mayer & Salovey (1997: 10-1)
is used to obtain a conceptualisation of emotional intelligence.

2.1 Mayer and Salovey's model of emotional intelligence

In terms of their original definition, Salovey & Mayer (1990: 189) re-
gard emotional intelligence as the ability to monitor one's own and
other people's emotions, to distinguish between these and to use this

information to guide one's own thoughts and actions. This included aspects such as verbal and non-verbal consciousness and expression of emotion, the regulation of emotion in the self and others, and the use of emotional content in problem-solving. Severe criticism followed, such as that the use of the word intelligence is irrelevant and misleading and that no unique abilities can be linked to emotions (Mayer & Salovey 1993: 433-4). Later, the authors criticised their own original definition as vague and focusing solely on the observation and regulation of emotions, while ignoring thoughts on emotions (Mayer & Salovey 1997: 10).

They then provided the following adapted definition of emotional intelligence:

> Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey 1997: 10).

This definition clearly implies that emotional intelligence includes cognitive as well as emotional aspects. The authors thus define emotional intelligence as an ability model by describing it in respect of four components of emotional abilities, namely:

- the ability to perceive, appraise and express emotions accurately;
- the emotional facilitation of thought;
- the understanding of emotions and the use of emotional knowledge, and
- emotional management and regulation in the self and others.

The four components of emotional intelligence are grouped from basic to more integrated psychological processes. The first component, namely the perception, appraisal and expression of emotions, encompasses more simple abilities and skills than the fourth component, which deals with the reflective regulation of emotions. Each component also comprises four levels of representative abilities and skills, varying from those that occur early in an individual's development and are poorly integrated, to those that occur within an integrated adult personality and are more difficult to distinguish. These apply mostly

to personal emotions but also to emotions in others (cf Mayer & Salovey 1997: 10; Mayer *et al* 1999a: 400.)

As an ability model, emotional intelligence is thus considered as the capacity to be aware of emotions and thoughts on emotions, as well as to understand and use emotional knowledge in order to accurately perceive, appraise, constructively regulate and manage emotions in the self and others. Its constructive use should lead to emotional and intellectual growth. This potential is expressed in practice in the form of emotion-related abilities and skills.

Table 1 illustrates the four components of emotional intelligence identified by Mayer & Salovey as well as the four levels of representative abilities and skills which fall under each component, followed by a short explanation of how these should apply to children.

2.1.1 Perception, appraisal and expression of emotion

The most basic component of Mayer & Salovey's model (1997), namely the perception, appraisal and expression of emotion, concerns the accuracy with which the individual can identify emotions and emotional content. This component is thus linked to children's ability to be aware of the emotions they experience and includes awareness in respect of the cognitive, emotional and physiological components of emotions. It also includes children's ability to be aware of emotions in others, as well as to be able to express emotions and associated needs accurately and to distinguish between true and false expressions of emotion (cf Mayer & Salovey 1997: 10-2; Mayer *et al* 1999a: 400; Mayer *et al* 1999b: 22).

This first component of emotional intelligence may be regarded as the basis for the subsequent components, as it is concerned mainly with awareness of emotions in the self and others, as well as with the accurate expression of these emotions. It thus relates to children's self-awareness, as well as to their empathic skills. The extent to which children are able to convey the needs associated with their emotions probably depends on their awareness of these needs. This implies that children should probably have a degree of self-knowledge in order to become aware of their needs.

Table 1: Components and abilities of emotional intelligence as identified by Mayer & Salovey (1997)

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4

Component 4: Reflective regulation of emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Ability to stay open to feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant.	Ability to reflectively engage or detach from an emotion, depending upon its adjudged informativeness or utility.	Ability to reflectively monitor emotions in relation to oneself and others, such as recognising how clear, typical, influential or reasonable they are.	Ability to manage emotion in oneself and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing pleasant ones without repressing or exaggerating the information they may convey.

Component 3: Understanding and analysing emotions; employing emotional knowledge

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Ability to label and recognise relations among words and emotions, such as the relation between liking and loving.	Ability to interpret the meanings that emotions convey regarding relationships, such as that sadness often accompanies loss.	Ability to understand complex feelings: simultaneous feelings of love and hate, or blends such as awe as a combination of fear and surprise.	Ability to recognise likely transitions among emotions, such as the transition from anger to satisfaction, or to shame.

Component 2: Emotional facilitation of thinking

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Emotions prioritise thinking by directing attention to important information.	Emotions are sufficiently vivid and available that they can be generated as aids to judgement and memory concerning feelings.	Emotional mood swings change the individual's perspective from pessimistic to optimistic, encouraging consideration of multiple points of view.	Emotional states differentially encourage specific problem approaches, such as when happiness facilitates inductive reasoning and creativity.

Component 1: Perception, appraisal and expression of emotion

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Ability to identify emotion in one's physical states, feelings and thoughts.	Ability to identify emotions in other people, designs, artwork, etc. through sound, language, appearance and behaviour.	Ability to express emotions accurately and to express needs related to those feelings.	Ability to discriminate between accurate or inaccurate, and honest or dishonest expressions of feeling.

Source: Mayer & Salovey (1997:11)

2.1.2 Emotional facilitation of thinking

The next component of Mayer & Salovey's model (1997), namely emotional facilitation of thinking, refers to the degree to which emotional events support intellectual processing. From birth, the emotions serve as an alarm system and as signs of important changes in individuals or their environments. As children grow, their emotions increasingly contribute towards forming and guiding their thoughts. For example, they feel concerned about the homework they ought to be doing, while they are watching television. Emotions can also be generated in children by asking them how a certain character in a story feels. This gives them the opportunity to generate emotions in themselves by placing themselves in another person's shoes. This skill enables children to make effective choices between alternative actions. The last two levels of abilities involved in this component are linked to more sophisticated ways in which emotional content can be used to direct thinking and to exercise alternative choices. For instance, a positive state of mind should facilitate investigating more alternatives in problem-solving (cf Mayer & Salovey 1997: 12-3; Mayer *et al* 1999a: 400).

This second component focuses mainly on the way in which emotions are used to direct children's thoughts and actions. Children should probably be aware of these emotions in order to use them as an aid to intellectual processing. This component is also linked to children's empathic abilities in that they can be led in a practical manner to obtain insight into other people's emotions, by placing themselves in the other's shoes. The last two levels of this component, at which emotional content is used consciously for such activities as creative problem-solving, are probably too advanced for the developmental level of primary-school children.

2.1.3 Understanding and analysing emotions

The third component of Mayer & Salovey's (1997) model, namely understanding and analysing emotions, relates to children's ability to label emotions and understand the differences and similarities between emotions, such as the difference between dismay and anger. Children also acquire skills in respect of emotional reasoning in that emotions are linked to situations. For instance, children learn to un-

derstand the link between the emotion of grief and the experience of loss in that they are helped to understand that they feel grief because their best friend has moved away. This component, however, also includes the ability to understand ambivalent emotions, such as that love and hatred can be experienced simultaneously, towards the same person. The most sophisticated level of this component includes the ability to understand that emotions can occur in specific patterns, depending on the situation. For instance, anger can turn into rage, resulting in guilt feelings. It also includes the ability to reason about the development of emotions within interpersonal relationships (cf Mayer & Salovey 1997: 13-4; Mayer *et al* 1999a: 400; Mayer *et al* 1999b: 22-3).

This component is concerned mainly with the child's ability to name emotions, as well as to understand the difference between emotions and assess the intensity of emotions. It also relates to the child's skill to adduce reasons for emotions. Often children do not have the emotional vocabulary to label emotions. Attention should be paid to this to enable the child to understand the various intensities of emotions, such as the difference between being cross and enraged. Children often also experience problems in understanding ambivalent emotions such as love and hatred towards the same person, and this experience of conflicting emotions can confuse the child.

2.1.4   Reflective regulation and management of emotions

The fourth component of Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model, namely reflective regulation and management of emotions, includes remaining open to positive as well as negative emotions, in other words the skill of being aware of emotions in oneself and others. As children develop, their educators may teach them that certain emotions are wrong or irrelevant, for instance that they must smile in public even if they feel sad. Children thus learn that there is a distinction between emotions and behaviour. Furthermore, children learn strategies of emotional self-control, such as that they must count to ten when they are cross. Children thus learn to associate themselves with a specific emotion or not, depending on whether it is relevant in the situation. The last two abilities of this component again refer to a more sophisticated form of emotional regulation, according to which individuals

pay attention to their own mood by evaluating it in respect of aspects such as how relevant it is to the situation concerned. Emotions can thus be managed by dampening negative feelings and promoting positive feelings, without repressing the information conveyed by the emotions (cf Mayer & Salovey 1997: 14-5; Mayer *et al* 1999a: 400).

The abilities of this component relate mainly to children's using relevant strategies for regulating and managing emotions. Learning these skills probably follows once children are aware of their emotions, can label them and can adduce reasons for them. Children are not always taught such strategies for dealing with their emotions, since they are often in the first instance not allowed to experience certain emotions such as anger. In view of this, they learn irrelevant strategies such as to deny their anger and to turn inwards. Children should not only understand the distinction between an emotion and consequent behaviour, but also learn effective strategies for dealing with various emotions. The mere dampening of negative emotions will not necessarily cause them to disappear.

In summary, it can be stated that Mayer & Salovey's (1997) model for emotional intelligence includes abilities and skills that should be applicable in respect of social work service-rendering to primary-school children. However, some of these skills appear more sophisticated and integrated and can only develop fully during adulthood. They focus to a large extent on being aware of one's own and other people's emotions, including skills such as labelling these emotions, identifying intensity of emotions, being aware of the associated cognitive processes and managing or regulating emotions. Epstein (1998: 20) mentions that Mayer & Salovey's (1997) model is an example of a scientifically accountable model for emotional intelligence, as it focuses on emotional aspects and intelligence rather than on a variety of other concepts which are not directly related, such as self-motivation and impulse control.

Self-awareness, emotional self-regulation and empathy, as components of the primary-school child's emotional intelligence, will now be described, followed by a discussion of specific aspects of importance during social work service-rendering to the primary-school child in this respect.

3. Description of self-awareness

According to Myers (1996: 42), the concept "[self]-awareness" means that one is aware of what is happening to one, as well as of emotions in reaction to this and what is done with these emotions. Myers (1996: 42) mentions the following: "Awareness involves fully experiencing your behaviour, thinking, feeling, spirituality, and noticing any obstacles to your experiencing." He regards this concept as synonymous with the concept of consciousness, namely being aware of oneself, others and the environment. Pert (1998: 286) mentions that "[f]ull consciousness must involve awareness of not just mental but emotional and even basic physical experiences as well". Goleman (1998b: 95-6) describes self-awareness as a deep understanding of one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives.

Self-awareness thus refers to sustained objective awareness of what is experienced every minute, with specific reference to awareness of one's own emotions on the basis of thought, emotional experiences, physical and sensory experiences, as well as awareness of needs, strong and weak points, drives and problems in this respect.

4. Social work service-rendering to primary-school children with regard to self-awareness

According to the literature, various skills may be sub-components of self-awareness, as a component of the primary-school child's emotional intelligence. Skills such as the following should be taught during social work service-rendering to primary-school children with regard to their self-awareness:[3]

- identifying emotions on the basis of physiological and emotional experiences, as well as thought;

- interpreting the significance conveyed by an emotion and being able to adduce reasons for emotions;

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3   Cf Artz 1994: 74; Goleman 1995: 268; 1998a: 54 and 61; Cooper & Sawaf 1997: 13; Shapiro 1997: 269; Mayer & Salovey 1997: 11; Saarni 1997: 47-58; Jensen *et al* 1998: 5; Freedman *et al* 1998: 1; Stone-McCown *et al* 1998: 51-8; Steiner & Perry 1999: 30.

- creating an emotional vocabulary and being able to label and express emotions accurately;
- understanding that conflicting emotions can be experienced simultaneously;
- self-knowledge and self-assessment of strong points and limitations, and
- awareness of needs experienced, and being able to express needs related to emotions.

The above implies that self-awareness, as a component of emotional intelligence, comprises specific sub-components to which attention should be paid during social work service-rendering. These sub-components focus on skills in respect of affective aspects, such as the awareness that a certain emotion is experienced and of the body's reaction. They also focus on cognitive aspects such as awareness of the reason for the emotion, insight in respect of conflicting emotions, and the ability to label emotions. Attention should also be paid to other aspects such as awareness of one's own needs, strong points and limitations.

Psychotherapy has proved that people can learn the language of emotions at any age, although those who learn it as children are usually more skilful (Shapiro 1997: 268). Service-rendering by means of play is specially suited to teaching children skills for emotional intelligence, as children can play out certain aspects over and over. Play affords a child the opportunity to learn new and practical ways of thinking, feeling and behaving and it can become an integral part of the emotional learning process (Shapiro 1997: xv). Oaklander (1997: 298) adds that various forms of play can help children to talk about and be aware of themselves and their emotions, including fantasy, drawing, clay-moulding, hand puppets, dramatised play, music, metaphors and processing dreams. Children must be taught that emotions themselves are "not detrimental" and that they may be freely experienced. Which strategy children choose to deal with their emotions can, however, have positive or negative consequences, causing positive or negative behaviour (Myers 1996: 140-1).

It seems that children must learn that emotions are neither right nor wrong, thus obtaining consent to experience any emotion. This

is probably the basis of service-rendering to children with regard to their self-awareness, as children who believe that certain emotions are prohibited will experience problems when they come into contact with these. Various forms of play can probably be used during social work in this respect, such as biblio-play, creative play and dramatised play.

5. Description of emotional self-regulation

Thompson (1994: 27-8) defines emotional self-regulation as "the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals". The author also mentions that emotional self-regulation includes the following aspects:

- Emotional stimulation can be maintained or improved, inhibited or suppressed: a child may maintain or arouse his/her anger in order to face a child who is bullying him/her, or suppress his/her anger towards a parent because he/she feels guilty about it.

- Intrinsic and extrinsic emotional self-management, in other words the use of internal strategies, such as a change in thought or external influences as when parents expect a child to manage his/her emotions in accordance with cultural prescriptions, for instance that a daughter who is cross may not show aggression.

- Emotional self-regulation sometimes affects the discrete emotion experienced, as with guilt feelings, but more often influences the forceful, temporal characteristics of the emotion, such as the anger underlying feelings of guilt.

- Emotional self-regulation is functional; it is aimed at achieving certain objectives, which can change over time. An example of such an objective is to maintain positive relationships with others.

This implies that emotional self-regulation focuses on the way in which emotions of which the individual is aware are managed by means of intrinsic and extrinsic strategies. It also focuses on the discrete emotion experienced, as well as on the forceful, temporal characteristics underlying this emotion. It is used to achieve a specific objective.

Like Thompson, Saarni (1997: 60) describes emotional self-regulation as

> [t]he recruitment of those processes within the self that facilitate a person's monitoring, evaluating, and changing [of] her emotional reactions to maximise her efficacy.

Brenner & Salovey (1997: 170) describe the concept as

> the process of managing responses that originate within cognitive-experienced, behavioural-expressive, and physiological-biochemical components.

The latter authors distinguish, like Thompson, between internal and external regulation strategies. Internal regulation strategies comprise the processes whereby emotions are regulated insofar as individuals change their inner experiences, such as thoughts and subjective feelings. External regulation strategies comprise the ways in which emotions are regulated insofar as individuals change their behaviour or environment. Oatley & Jenkins (1996: 193) mention in summary that the implicit significance of all the definitions is that all people experience emotions and that these should be experienced and expressed at certain optimal levels.

It is thus apparent that there are various definitions of the concept of emotional self-regulation, although it refers mainly to the internal and external processes which an individual uses to monitor, evaluate and change cognitive experiences, behaviour-expressive and physiological-biochemical aspects, in order to enhance effectiveness and achieve objectives. It thus refers to all processes that form part of dealing with emotions, including the way in which they are managed and/or controlled.

6. Social work among primary-school children with regard to emotional self-regulation

Enabling children to gain insight into their emotions is not sufficient as far as teaching the skills necessary for emotional management is concerned. Emotional literacy must be aimed at both the emotional and the thinking areas of the brain (cf Shapiro 1997: 285-6). According to O'Connor (1983: 251), emotional management includes specific sub-skills, namely awareness of various emotions, the ability to relate these emotions to their daily life, and the ability to verbalise them. One must also explain to children that choices may be exer-

cised with respect to the way in which emotions are expressed, as well as to the consequences of any specific choice. As far as emotional self-regulation is concerned, children must learn to control their actions, in order to make the most creative and relevant decision with respect to dealing with emotions (cf Oaklander 1988: 122; Myers 1996: 142; Freedman *et al* 1998: 1). In addition to this, Jensen *et al* (1998: 20) mention that children must take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Younger children, however, must be guided and helped to identify alternative strategies for dealing with emotions.

Stone-McCown *et al* (1998: 13-4) describe a strategy appropriate to service-rendering according to which children can be assisted in learning to manage their emotions more relevantly. Called the "trumpet process", it consists of the following steps:

- Affective experience, with the child stating that he/she became angry when a friend teased him.

- Making a list of responses, helping the child to answer questions such as: What did you think? What did you feel? and What did you do?

- Recognising patterns, enhancing the child's awareness of his/her typical behaviour within a specific situation by asking questions such as: What have you just done? What are you doing now? and Do you usually do this?

- Possessing patterns, in which the child examines the patterns recognised in the previous step and accepts them as his/her own, acknowledging, for example: "I usually hit a child when I get angry, because it makes me feel better."

- Considering different consequences, helping the child to examine the consequences of various patterns of dealing with emotions.

- Considering alternatives, helping the child to imagine and examine alternative modes of action appropriate to a situation.

- Evaluating, with the child making a choice in respect of future action and taking responsibility for it.

It is apparent from the above that self-awareness skills and emotional self-regulation skills are closely related and will probably be dealt with as a unit during service-rendering. When children experi-

ence a specific emotion, they must thus be guided to evaluate the various actions they can take in order to make responsible choices.

The ability to use self-speech as a guide to behaviour develops between the ages of five and seven and can be used by children as a strategy to examine the multiple options for dealing with their emotions, as well as a self-regulating mechanism monitoring and controlling their thinking, behaviour and emotions (cf Shaffer 1994: 229; Shapiro 1997: 120; Freedman *et al* 1999: 1). Jensen *et al* (1998: 19) regard self-speech as "a mechanism to mentally explore multiple options and viewpoints". An example of this is that children who experience anxiety play out various strategies for themselves by means of self-speech and consider the consequences of each in order to choose the most suitable strategy. It can also be used by children as a strategy for learning to control impulsive behaviour. The principle underlying this strategy is that children start to believe a statement by repeating it. For example, when another child wants to bully him/her, the child may repeatedly say to him/herself: "I can handle Peter. I can tell him to leave me alone. I know how to get help". By saying this, the child will start to believe it. Such repetitive thought stimulates activities in the neocortex of the brain which inhibit the emotional brain's secretion of hormones and other chemical messengers which prepare one to react (cf Shapiro 1997: 121).

During social work service-rendering primary-school children can thus be made aware of the possibility of using self-speech for constructive emotional management and control, and should be guided to identify relevant modes of self-speech for various situations.

Empowering children is another way of improving their emotional control. Assuring children that they have specific qualities such as self-discipline or patience and that they are able to manage their emotions appropriately, even when cross, can contribute towards improving their emotional control. This is possible by means of the empowerment and control which they experience and their improved self-image (Shaffer 1994: 231-2). It is thus apparent that positive feedback from the environment, convincing children that they have certain positive character traits, can contribute towards more effective emotional self-regulation.

Although the primary-school child can probably experience various basic emotions such as happiness, grief and anger, as well as more complex emotions such as jealousy, the emotions of anger, fear and anxiety should be briefly emphasised, as the environment does not often allow the child to verbalise these emotions. As Fontana & Slack (1998: 54) put it:

> One of the reasons why children feel helpless in the face of strong emotions like fear and anger is that they lack any real understanding of them. Such emotions can seem to be powerful things that rise unbidden, and overwhelm them with energies they are unable to control.

Many authors (cf Oaklander 1988: 221; Goleman 1995: 59; Wright & Olivier 1995: 90; Shapiro 1997: 285) are of the opinion that the effective management of anger is one of the problems with which children have to deal most often in daily life and that it is often suppressed. According to Shapiro (1997: 285), at least 40% to 50% of children referred for therapeutic help experience problems in dealing with anger and aggression. Oaklander (1998: 221) confirms this by stating that anger is the most "feared, resisted, suppressed, threatening emotion — because it is so often the most important and deepest hidden block to one's sense of wholeness and well-being". This implies that during service-rendering to the primary-school child attention must be paid to the his/her emotional awareness and self-regulation of anger.

When working on children's anger, service-rendering must focus on the following (cf Oaklander 1988: 209; Wright & Olivier 1995: 95-101; Schoeman 1996a: 175-8):

- Practical ways of expressing anger must be given to children.
- Children must be guided to possess their anger.
- Children must be helped to express their anger verbally.
- One must talk with children about their anger.
- Children must acquire the insight that anger itself is neither good nor bad.
- Children must be guided to accept responsibility for their anger in order to control it.

- Children must be guided to make choices on appropriate management of their anger.

During service-rendering specific attention should be paid to children's awareness of anger and strategies for dealing with it. It seems that children must be given permission to experience the emotion in order to control it. Only then will they be able to make more appropriate choices on dealing with it.

Other emotions which primary school children must be aware of and which they must learn to deal with are fear and anxiety. According to Oaklander (1988: 238) and Swedo & Leonard (1998: 104) children have many more fears than adults are aware of. Children need to talk about their fears, which must be acknowledged, accepted and respected. Only then can children obtain sufficient inner strength to deal with it. According to Schoeman (1996b: 88), fantasies in the form of stories can be used to positive effect to teach children to become aware of the fears which they usually suppress, in order to arrive at strategies for dealing with them. Fantasies help children to project their fears in order to release their emotions.

It is apparent from the above that during service-rendering, primary-school children must be helped to become aware of the fears they experience and to learn appropriate emotional skills for managing them. It is also clear that fantasy, in the form of stories and fairy-tales, can be used for this purpose in that they give the child the opportunity to project his/her fears onto a character in the story or fairy-tale and to identify with an emotional strategy used by a character in the story or fairy-tale.

7. Description of empathy

The literature offers various definitions of empathy, a term derived from the German word "(e)infuhlung", which describes the aesthetic experience. Originally, it referred to "the ability to feel ourselves into things" (Pinchos 1984: 171). Shapiro (1997: 50) says that empathy means to put yourself in someone else's shoes, whereas Cooper & Sawaf (1997: 51) mention that empathy literally means "to feel with". Feshbach (1982: 319) and Erwin (1993: 31) distinguish three main aspects of empathy, namely:

- the ability to distinguish between and label the emotions of other people and thus to react empathically towards them;

- the ability to consider the perspectives and roles of other people, and

- the ability to be emotionally responsible towards others, in other words the ability to experience an observed emotion in order to share it.

Empathy thus implies that people can think themselves into other people's lives, by being able to identify with their emotions and understand them. A person with empathy thus distinguishes and labels other people's emotions, has insight into their perspectives and roles, and shows emotional responsivity towards them.

8. Developing primary-school children's skills for empathy

According to Saarni (1997: 49), service-rendering with respect to enhancing the child's empathic skills should focus mainly on the following aspects:

- The child should be able to decode the meaning of everyday emotional facial expressions.

- The child should understand the everyday situations that can elicit emotions.

- The child should understand that others have opinions, intentions and perceptions, in other words an inner state.

- Unique information about others must be taken into account in order to understand that another person can experience an emotional response which differs from his/her own.

According to Saarni (1997: 49), children's ability to distinguish between and label other people's emotions is related to their ability to use situational and expressive clues. There is a degree of cultural correspondence about such clues with respect to their emotional meaning. Children's ability to respond appropriately to other people's emotions is related to their interpersonal communication skills, including listening and talking, as well as their awareness of the non-verbal communication of emotions (cf Erwin 1993: 83; Jensen *et al*

1998: 5.) The ability to observe emotions in other people, especially from facial expressions, as well as to interpret them and to react appropriately to them, forms an important part of children's skills in terms of, and affects their behaviour towards others (cf Erwin 1993: 83; Goleman 1995: 123.) Other ways in which one can respond effectively to the emotions of other people include, according to Shapiro (1997: 174-5), paying attention to what the other person says and the way in which it is said. One must also listen actively without being distracted while the conversation is taking place. If necessary, one must ask for explanations or more details. One must show also that the other person's emotions are being understood by reflecting them back to him/her and by making eye contact.

Children react with more empathy towards someone whom they observe as being the same as themselves, or having a similar experience. Encouraging children to see their similarities with others can contribute towards the development of their empathetic skills. The way in which this encouragement takes place must, however, be suited to a child's age-related level of abstraction (Bartlett 1987: 154). This aspect can probably be practically dealt with during service-rendering, by telling children a story which is similar to their own situation. Children can also be reminded of emotions in their own lives, such as how they felt when their pet died, and that their friend possibly feels the same on the death of a family member. Schoeman (1996b: 87) mentions that stories can promote children's empathetic understanding in that children can relate them to their own lives, think about them and distance themselves from them. When children listen to a story, they can evaluate their own emotions, obtain insight and think of possible solutions.

Children who are encouraged to feel good about themselves, tend to show more empathy towards others than children who are preoccupied with feelings of personal inadequacy and other worries about themselves. If children are given the opportunity to acquire helping skills, they will probably tend to show more empathy towards others. For instance, a child who knows how to behave towards a friend who is in tears over a parent's death will probably be more empathetic than a child who does not have such helping skills (Barnett 1987: 156). Promoting a positive self-concept during service-rendering can

thus probably contribute towards the development of the child's empathetic skills. As children gain more confidence in these, they should act with increasing empathy towards others.

It is thus apparent that during service-rendering one should focus on the primary-school child's interpersonal communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal. With respect to non-verbal skills, it seems that the child's awareness of the non-verbal communication of emotions as well as skill in interpreting such communication in the context is important. With respect to verbal skills, it seems that the child's ability to listen to the emotional communication of others, as well as to respond appropriately, is an important skill. If children have the appropriate emotional vocabulary, they will be better able to confirm the emotions of others.

9.   Summary

Primary-school children face important emotional developmental tasks, such as adapting to school and learning specific social skills. There is increasing awareness of the important role played by emotional intelligence in respect of the child's general adaptation. The mental health crisis facing children in South Africa due to socioeconomic conditions and problems such as urbanisation, unemployment, broken families, poverty, riots, child abuse and molestation, means that school social workers should be all the more involved in planning and presenting programmes focusing on life skills. This aspect was also accentuated in the *White Paper for Social Welfare* (1997). Although many children move successfully through the developmental tasks of the childhood years, a growing number of children manifest emotional and behavioural problems requiring professional attention. Children should thus have the opportunity to learn specific emotional intelligence skills during social work service-rendering. Abilities and skills in respect of specific emotional competency components of emotional intelligence, namely self-awareness, emotional self-regulation and empathy, seem to be particularly important.

Social work service-rendering in respect of the primary-school child's self-awareness and emotional self-regulation should address a variety of skills. As far as self-awareness skills are concerned, the

social worker should emphasise affective aspects such as awareness and physical experience of emotions, as well as cognitive aspects such as awareness of the reasons for emotions and labelling emotions. Awareness of one's own needs, strong points and limitations seem to be other important aspects. Emotional self-regulation skills stem from awareness of the emotion. The ability to use self-speech and empowerment in respect of specific qualities are important. Service-rendering should thus focus first on helping the child to experience and express emotions, whereafter relevant strategies for dealing with emotion should be provided to enable the child to take responsibility for the emotion and thus control it.

In respect of empathetic skills, children should be encouraged to see similarities between themselves and others, and to feel good about themselves. Attention should be paid to the following important aspects: awareness of the non-verbal communication of emotions by others and possession of an emotional vocabulary and verbal skills to respond appropriately to the emotions of others.

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