

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**TEACHING TO CARE:
EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT TEACHERS SUPPORT
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology at Massey University,
Wellington, New Zealand**

Maria Luisa Ulloa

October 2011

ABSTRACT

A considerable amount of research has demonstrated that successful teacher- child interactions in early childhood settings are critical predictors of mental health, social competence, and academic achievement. A few studies have been focused on the processes in which teachers support children's emotional competence and the influence of their own emotional competence on these processes. This thesis examined a variety of sources of influence for enhancing the capacity to develop emotional competence in preschool children. Its general purpose was on how teachers create classroom atmospheres that promote positive emotional development. Specifically, this research investigated the teachers' ability to implement strategies to facilitate children's emotional communications in order to generate synchronous relationships that allow emotional competence through language and other cognitive processes. Emotional interactions, strategies used by teachers for promoting emotional socialization, and emotional atmospheres of Early Childhood Education (ECE) classrooms are inter-linked, because the general emotional atmosphere allows teachers to be more mindful, less reactive, and more strategic in responding to children's emotions.

The first phase of the research involved a naturalistic observation study in three culturally diverse preschool settings over a 10-week period. Emotional interaction patterns and strategies that contributed to or obstructed the children's emotional understanding were identified. The study demonstrated that the observed Early Childhood Education centres which promoted interactions that considered children's emotions and that used more responsive strategies such as emotion coaching, encouraging of mastery, expressiveness of feelings and emotion talk, showed less frequency of aggressive, unresolved conflict compared with centres that used more reactive

and preventive strategies. The identified positive strategies implemented by teachers inspired the development of an emotion-focused intervention that constituted the second phase of this research.

The second phase consisted of a randomised controlled trial with 30 early childhood education teachers. Half of the participants—the experimental group—were taught strategies to enhance their own and the children’s emotional competence. The participants in the control group were provided standard information regarding children’s development. The training intervention included active strategies involving emotion coaching, emotional schemas, reflective practice, and mindfulness training. Teachers’ outcomes were assessed in situ during a pretend play session with small groups of preschool-aged children. The dependent variables were observed occurrences of different components of emotion competence in teachers. The study showed significant statistical effects across the three different emotional competence skills demonstrated by early childhood teachers during a game situation.

Both studies highlighted the processes through which teachers support emotional competence of young children, and the importance of the role of early childhood teachers on socialisation of children’s emotions. Most importantly, it gave evidence, based on the influence of emotion-focused teacher training, in supporting teachers’ emotional skills so they can optimally meet the emotional needs of children. This research has significant implications for preschoolers’ mental health, educational practice, and policies aiming to protect children from previous or future risk exposure. It also contributed to the integration of psychological and educational research on the role of teachers as agents of the emotion socialization in young children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has had innumerable companions. I would like to express my gratitude to the early childhood centres, to the wonderful teachers and the lovely children who participated in this research. Their inspirational presence and unconditional collaboration made this project not only possible but a beautiful experience.

It is difficult to overstate the gratitude I have towards my main supervisor, Ian Evans. He provided me with the encouragement necessary to grow and progress through this topic, always giving me sound advice and amazing teaching, and offering his great company and support enlightening lots of brilliant ideas. I would like to thank Linda Jones my second supervisor. I appreciate all her contributions of time, ideas, and invaluable support that made this experience productive and stimulating.

I am indebted to all my friend and peers, old and new, from CHERUBS lab. The group has been such a big part of my life, as source of friendships, support, and companionship through all these years. I learnt so much from being with you, and I feel so privileged to have met you all.

To my incomparable friend, Lucia Munoz. For being, such an amazing company in life and for gently coaching me through the world of SPSS and statistics.

I am grateful to all the staff at Massey University Wellington campus for all the financial and academic support and for making my PhD time smooth and enjoyable. Special thanks to Irene Tay for being always such a caring presence in my life throughout this process.

Finally, my gratitude goes to my wonderful family and their unequivocal support throughout these years. Nothing is possible in life without you. Thanks for the unconditional love of Bernardo, Luisa, Adam, Esteban, and Tommy and for the hours of patience, encouragement, loving, fun and for being a constant source of love and beauty in my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
FOREWORD	xii
CHAPTER 1: EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN.....	18
Defining Emotions.....	19
Emotion Schemas.....	21
The socialisation of children’s emotional competence.....	23
Emotional Regulation	24
Emotional Expression	25
Emotional Knowledge.....	26
Emotion Utilisation	28
Teachers’ role in the process of emotion socialization.....	30
Young children and attachment relationships.....	34
Teacher-child relationship and emotional climate of classrooms	37
Emotional competence of teachers in early childhood centres.....	41
Interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of teacher’s emotional competence.....	42
Emotion- focused interventions	45
Summary.....	47

CHAPTER 2: A NATURALISTIC OBSERVATIONAL STUDY - STUDY 1.....	50
Introduction.....	50
The observational study.....	52
Method.....	54
Participants and settings.....	54
Measures.....	57
Procedure.....	59
Data analysis.....	61
Results.....	65
Interactions.....	65
Emotional strategies.....	70
Quantitative analysis.....	72
Discussion.....	78
Summary.....	83
CHAPTER 3: INTERVENTION STUDY PROCEDURE AND QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS STUDY 2.....	85
Method.....	87
Participants.....	87
Measures.....	89
Materials.....	90
Design.....	99
Procedure.....	100
Data reduction and coding.....	104
Results.....	109

Frequency of occurrences: Phase 1 before the presentation of the emotional event	110
Comparison of scores between experimental and control groups on emotional competence components (Phase 2 of the game)	112
Global Measure of Overall Emotional Performance	117
Emotional Style Questionnaire	119
CHAPTER 4: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION. STUDY 2	121
Data reduction	118
Thematic Analysis of the training stages	123
Stage 1: Creating an environment of acceptance and validation of feelings.	124
Stage 2: Offering conceptual – practical elements on the emotion theory.	126
Stage 3: Evoking and exploring the emotional experience within a reflective on emotions framework.	128
Stage 4: Facilitate the mobilization of new schemas: Strategies for self awareness	133
Discussion	136
Examples of teachers’ narratives during the contrived task	137
Discussion	137
CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	147
Limitations	155
Conclusion	158
POSTSCRIPT	161
APPENDICES	185

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Compared Means Emotion-Regulation.....	115
Table 2 Compared Means Emotion-Expression	116
Table 3 Compared Means Emotion-Knowledge.....	117
Table 4 Compared Pairs of Means Between Coders Overall Performance.....	119

、

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Frequencies of categories of child- teacher interaction.....	72
Figure 2: Preventive strategies identified in teachers	75
Figure 3: Reactive strategies identified in teachers	75
Figure 4: Responsive strategies identified in teachers	76
Figure 5: Compared frequency of aggressive and non-aggressive conflicts	77
Figure 6: Other variables	78
Figure 7: Illustration of the procedure for the contrived emotional task and crocodile game.....	99
Figure 8: Frequency of occurrence of interacting skills during Phase 1.....	112
Figure 9: Group comparisons for emotional regulation.....	115
Figure 10: Group comparisons for emotional expression.....	116
Figure 11: Group comparisons for emotional knowledge.....	117
Figure 12: Global measure of overall performance.....	120
Figure 13: Training model.....	138

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information for Centres, Study 1.....	186
Appendix B: Parents Information Brochure, Study 1.....	189
Appendix C: Teachers Information Letter, Study 1.....	191
Appendix D: Consent for Parents, Study 1.....	193
Appendix E: Teachers Consent Form, Study 1.....	194
Appendix F: Information Letter for Centres, Study 2.....	195
Appendix G: Information Letter Participant Teachers.....	197
Appendix H: Teachers Consent Form, Study 2.....	199
Appendix I: Consent for Parents, Study 2.....	200
Appendix J: Teachers Emotional Style Questionnaire	201
Appendix K: Te Mihi.....	202
Appendix L: Programme Curriculum.....	203
Appendix M: Photos: Crocodile.....	216
Appendix N: Child Development Overview.....	217
Appendix O: Experiential Exercise	220
Appendix P: Game Protocol	221
Appendix Q: Coding Phase 1	222
Appendix R: Coding Phase 2	223
Appendix S: Scoring of Global Overall Performance Measure... ..	224
Appendix T: Certificate and evaluation form	225
Appendix U: Reflective Practice Case Reports.....	227

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA: Analysis of variance

CD: Compact Disc

CHERUBS: Children's Environments: Research Unit for Behavioural Studies

DET: Differential Emotion Theory

ECE: Early Childhood Education

EE: Emotional Expression

EK: Emotional Knowledge

ER: Emotional Regulation

ESQ: Emotional Style Questionnaire

EFT: Emotion Focus Therapy

MEP: Meta- Emotion Philosophy

MESQ: Maternal Emotional Style Questionnaire

NZ: New Zealand

RCT: Randomised Control Trial

TESQ: Teacher Emotional Style Questionnaire

USA: United States of America