

Toward Emotional Competences

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and Ottavia Albanese (eds.)

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Toward emotional competences: An introduction

Francisco Pons, Marie-France Daniel, Louise Lafortune, Pierre-André Doudin,
and Ottavia Albanese

This book is the result of a collaboration by twenty-four scholars in developmental psychology, clinical psychology and educational sciences from Europe (Denmark, France, Italy, Switzerland, and United Kingdom), North America (Canada and United States), and Oceania (Australia). It provides an overview of novel and significant research on emotional competences from psychological, clinical and pedagogical points of view. Indeed, emotional competences have emerged as one of the main factors of psychological functioning and development and of individual differences in this functioning and development.

At a general level, emotional competences can be defined as the abilities to (1) experience, (2) recognize, (3) express, (4) control the expression of, (5) regulate the experience of and (6) understand emotions. In line with the work of Saarni (2000), the term “emotional competence” will be used in this text to describe these six competences. However, other terms such as “emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Grewal, 2005) or “metaemotion” (Pons, Doudin, Harris & de Rosnay, 2002) could have been also used.

The book is divided into 10 chapters, and each one explores at least one of these six emotional competences. Some of the chapters are theoretical (theory-driven) while others are empirical (data-driven). Some report basic research (epistemologically orientated) whereas others report “applied” research (pragmatically orientated). Depending on the chapter, the participants involved in the research (case or group studies) are typically-developing children, adolescents and adults and non-typical people from Western and non-Western societies and cultures. Depending on the chapter, the methodologies of the research are: naturalistic observations, interviews, diary methods, self-reports, questionnaires

or psychometric tests, and the analyses are either qualitative or quantitative. Depending on the chapter, one or several basic or complex emotions are investigated (e.g. from happiness, anger, fear, sadness to guilt, shame or pride). With this book, the reader will achieve an up-to-date and extensive understanding of emotional competences, their natures, developments, causes, consequences and possibilities for improvement.

In the first chapter, “Emotion understanding as a reflective emotional competence: Between experiences and symbols” Pons, de Rosnay, Doudin, Harris, and Cuisinier investigate the impact of affective experiences and symbolic cognitions on emotion understanding. Recent studies have suggested that children’s symbolic cognitive abilities and affective experiences may have an impact on their understanding of emotion. However, the specific contributions of these characteristics have rarely been examined. The aim of the research introduced in this chapter is to evaluate the specific effect(s) of learning difficulties (as symbolic cognitive characteristics) as well as previous abuse (as experiential and affective characteristics) on adolescents’ understanding of several simple and complex components of emotion understanding. Both theoretical and applied implications of this research are analyzed.

In the second chapter, “Children’s emotion understanding: Preliminary data of the Italian validation project of Test of Emotion Comprehension (TEC)” Albanese, Grazzani Gavazzi, Molina, Antoniotti, Arati, Farina, and Pons present the first results of the Italian standardization of the TEC. The validity and the reliability of the TEC have been evaluated in previous studies. However, no proper standardization of this instrument was available until now. This chapter is the first step toward the resolution of this gap within the context of a Western Latin society and culture: Italy. When completed, this standardization should permit researchers and clinicians to locate a child (3 to 11 years of age) in terms of emotional understanding with respect to his or her reference population. This localization can either be general (with respect to the child’s overall level of emotion understanding) or more specific (with respect to the child’s understanding of a specific component of emotion understanding).

In the third chapter, “Adolescence and awareness of positive emotions: A diary study”, Grazzani, Albanese, and Duncan investigate awareness of positive emotions as a dimension of subjective well-being and as a protective factor in adolescents. Most of the studies on emotions in adolescents focus on negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, depression or anxiety. However, an increasing number of studies in line with the wave of interest for positive psychology are starting to address the question of positive emotions. The main goal of the research presented in this chapter is to study both well-being and

related positive emotions in adolescents using a diary method. More specifically, the three main goals of the research are to investigate in adolescent girls and boys: (1) positive emotions and emotions in everyday life; (2) gender differences and similarities in relation to positive emotions and life satisfaction and (3) the relationships between positive emotions and subjective well-being. Both theoretical and applied implications of this research are analyzed.

In the fourth chapter, “Guilt as an information mechanism in adolescents” Mancini and Gangemi examine the impact of guilt on adolescents’ reasoning according to the “affect-as-information mechanism” hypothesis in which emotions are used as salient information in the formulation of judgments and evaluations. To this aim a study is presented in which the impact of adolescents’ experience of guilt on their judgments of danger and the effectiveness of preventive performance are investigated. Both clinical and psycho-educational implications of this research are analyzed.

In the fifth chapter, “Emotions and individual differences: the cognitive constructive model applied to eating disorders in childhood” Strepparava starts by presenting a general overview of the cognitive-constructive approach and continues by discussing eating disorders personality with the main focus on related emotional experiences. The chapter ends with the preliminary results of a study on emotional narrative concerning happiness, sadness, anger and fear in school-aged children with and without eating disorders and/or body image disturbances. The relevance of this research for the field of eating disorders studies is discussed.

In the sixth chapter, “A reflection on the relationship between emotions and critical thinking” Lafortune and Robertson look at the relation between emotions and critical thinking. Underlying their chapter are questions such as: Can the manifestation of emotions influence (positively or negatively) the expression of critical thought? Can the development of critical thinking influence the expression or comprehension of emotions? Are there actions or interventions that would make it possible to improve the regulation of emotions and thereby promote the expression of critical thought? Can the development of skills linked to critical thinking promote better regulation of emotions? The authors also explore possible actions directed at both emotions and critical thinking in order to reach pupils in different ways.

In the seventh chapter, “The development of emotional competency: Using interactive-reflective activities as a family assistance program in mathematics” Lafortune analyses emotions according to a cognitive perspective with regard to parental interventions with children learning mathematics. To pursue this issue three research results are presented in relation to: (1) the validation of