

Teachers' role in emotion recognition and emotion regulation within the process of intercultural adjustment of migrant children

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ABSTRACT

Migrant children are a considerable group of moving populations and their dramatically increased number over the last few years led the European countries to seriously take into consideration their education as a means for social inclusion. However, the role of children's emotions in the process of their intercultural adjustment has been mainly obscured from the different educational approaches. The aim of this paper is to investigate the role teachers can play in emotion recognition and emotion regulation within the process of intercultural adjustment of migrant children. The nature and connection of emotion with intercultural adjustment, as well as the notions of emotion recognition and emotion regulation are discussed. Possible ways in which teachers can facilitate emotion recognition and emotion regulation are examined. Finally, certain challenges that may occur, as well as, actions focussing on teachers' support are asserted.

KEY WORDS

Emotion recognition, emotion regulation, migrant children, intercultural adjustment

RÉSUMÉ

Les enfants de migrants sont un groupe considérable de populations en mouvement et leur nombre considérablement accru au cours des dernières années a conduit les pays européens à prendre sérieusement en considération leur éducation comme un moyen pour l'inclusion sociale. Cependant, le rôle des émotions des enfants dans le processus de leur adaptation interculturelle a été principalement masqué par les différentes approches éducatives. L'objectif de cet article est d'étudier le rôle que les enseignants peuvent jouer dans la reconnaissance des émotions et la régulation des émotions dans le processus d'adaptation interculturelle des enfants migrants. On discute de la nature et la connexion de l'émotion avec l'ajustement de l'interculturel, ainsi que les notions de reconnaissance et de régulation de l'émotion. On examine aussi des moyens possibles par lesquels les enseignants peuvent faciliter la reconnaissance et la régulation des émotions. Enfin, certains défis qui peuvent survenir, ainsi que des actions centrées sur le soutien des enseignants sont affirmés.

MOTS-CLÉS

Reconnaissance des émotions, règlement de l'émotion, les enfants migrants, adaptation interculturelle

INTRODUCTION

Migrant children are a considerable group of moving populations, representing the 10% - 20% of the total of migrant population in Europe (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2012; Eurostat, 2013). Their dramatically increased number over the last few years led the European countries to invest in their education as a measure to achieve social cohesion in the long term (Essomba, 2014). As racism, xenophobia, intolerance and other forms of discrimination are still noticeable in European states (Council of Europe, 2008), European educational authorities, mainly focus on the manifestation of anti-racist or anti-bullying policies in order to prevent migrant children's victimization (Council of Europe, 2009, 2010).

In addition, most of the educational processes and policies proposed by the European Institutions emphasise on academic achievement and on the learning of the new language, as a means for social adjustment and inclusion (European Commission, 2013; SIRIUS, 2013). However, although European - wide policies are generally positive towards inclusion, evidence suggests the weakness or failure of inclusion policies (Essomba, 2014). A possible reason for this is that they regard migrant children as a homogeneous group (Hamilton, 2013) presenting low academic achievement, due to their low socio-economic status (European Commission, 2013; Essomba, 2014). Apparently, the role of children's emotions in the process of their adjustment has been mainly obscured or totally absent from the different educational approaches.

The aim of this paper is to concentrate on the teacher - student interpersonal relationship and to investigate the role teachers can play in emotion recognition and emotion regulation within the process of intercultural adjustment of migrant children. Firstly, the nature and connection of emotion with intercultural adjustment, as well as the notions of emotion recognition and emotion regulation are discussed. Then, possible ways in which teachers can facilitate emotion recognition and emotion regulation within an interpersonal relationship with migrant children are examined. Finally, certain challenges that may occur, as well as, actions focussing on teachers' support are asserted.

EMOTION AND INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The variety of definitions concerning emotion, and the lack of consensus regarding its nature (Cole, Martin & Dennis, 2004), reveals the complex character of the notion (Mordka, 2016). In addition, the plethora of perceptions of its role in human life and development given by different emotion theories (Cole et al., 2004; Weiner, 2007; Zembylas, 2007), requires a dynamic and multilayered integration of perspectives from different fields in order to provide an explicit understanding of emotions and their relation to adjustment. Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2007) proposed an inclusive definition of emotion according to which "an emotion is a complex psychological state that involves three distinct components: a *subjective experience*, a *physiological response*, and a *behavioral or expressive response*". This definition acknowledges the subjectivity of emotion but it also refers to its physical, psychological and social dimensions. In this sense, it can be considered as a contextualized framework for the investigation of emotions' role in a multi dimensional process, such as the process of intercultural adjustment.

Adjustment is also regarded as a subjective experience which essentially refers to a general concept of well-being as an affective evaluation of one's life situation (Yoo, Matsumoto & LeRoux, 2006). However, adjustment, similarly to emotion, is not a strictly "private" and "individual" process. It is, rather, a constant and vigilant coping process (Cole et al., 2004), realised within a particular social context in which emotions, as basic and

subjective components, play a major role. In fact, emotions are indicators of adjustment, and of one's sense of well-being. Since they give a personal meaning to our experiences, they play a crucial role in the formation of our perceptions about ourselves, events and situations we live in (Yoo et al., 2006). In this way, emotions are significant contributors in the quality of our interpersonal relationships, which in turn, greatly affect the extent of our successful adjustment.

In particular, emotion regulation has been regarded as a vital component to the creation and maintenance of positive relationship with peers (Denham et al., 2003) and, as such, an important predictor of positive intercultural adjustment (Matsumoto et al., 2001, 2003). As it has been defined by Gross (1998) emotion regulation is "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (p. 275). In this way, emotion regulation denotes two types of regulatory functions: emotion as a regulating factor of behaviour and relationships (Rydell, Berlin & Bohlin, 2003) and emotion as a regulated internal component (Cole et al., 2004). The regulatory functions of emotions also imply that emotions do not just occur, as a reaction to external stimuli, but individuals can control and influence their emotional experiences. Emotion regulation in stressful situations like the process of intercultural adjustment, includes not only one's reactivity to the negative emotions of others, but also dealing with one's own negative feelings (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992).

Emotion recognition is positively correlated with emotional regulation (Yoo et al., 2006) as it is conceptually more primary than emotion regulation. Regulation is only possible after recognition has occurred (Lane, 2000; Izard, 2001). If emotion is not acknowledged, it can't be accepted and, thus, it is difficult for the person who experiences the emotion, to recognise the necessity of its regulation.

Migration and emotion

The migration process causes a variety of emotions, related to the sense of losing one's "home". Leaving a home means, not only leaving the surroundings, but, most importantly, losing the meaningful relations with family and friends. Consequently, migrant children are confronted with the challenge to adopt in an, often, conflict arousing environment, with different moral values and a new language (Kouider, Koglin & Petermann, 2014). In terms of their schooling, they have to become rapidly familiar with specific academic rules and routines, buildings and groups of people in order to function within their school environments (Hamilton, 2013).

In addition, migrant children may also suffer indirectly by lack of support from their families due to "asymmetric accumulation" (Stevens & Volleberg, 2008) that is to say, when children acquire the new culture and language faster than their parents. Conflicting emotions also emerge when migrant children feel like adjusting into a new way of living, whereas their parents are still grieving on what they have lost. The way parents feel about their situation in the host country, as they confront poverty, unemployment, even lack of a decent accommodation, forms their emotional responses to the new situations and their mental health. Parents' emotional well being and mental health, in turn, affect migrant children's emotions of the new situation and are basic predictors of children's intercultural adjustment (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999).

Conflict - arousing situations in which migrant children are forced to live in are also seeped with negative emotions. Apparently, negative emotions, such as sorrow, grief, anxiety and anger are dominant in migrant children. These emotions may be formed by outside events (e.g. racism and stereotyping), but they are gradually internalised through negative emotional experiences of disgust, anger, sadness, fear, frustration, shame and guilt. The subjectivity in experiencing these feelings lays in the fact that in the repertoire of emotions elicited by

migration, different children experience different ranges of emotions (Beatty, 2005). In the same way, different children express their emotions in different ways, as these are emerged in diverse living circumstances, are regulated by different social norms (Zembylas, 2007) and are also derived and maintained within a unique system of interpersonal relationships between migrant children and their “significant others”. In addition, each child can assert their own control over their emotions, affected by their personal characteristics, as well as the dominant social norms in their culture.

Correspondingly, in a physiological level, each child responds differently to these emotions and may seek for medical assistance for symptoms that are psychosomatic or stress related, rather than purely pathological (Petermann & Koglin, 2008; Vieno et al., 2009; Hamilton, 2013).

In any case, negative emotions are imbedded in and motivate migrant children's behaviour, and consequently, deeply affect the extent and the quality of their adjustment into a new social environment. Therefore, if they are not recognised and managed effectively they may severely hinder migrant children's successful intercultural adjustment and damagingly affect their development (Petermann & Koglin, 2008).

The role of teachers in emotion recognition and emotion regulation within the process of intercultural adjustment of migrant children

Despite the clear recommendation in the general policy frame included in the European Council Conclusions (European Council, 2009) for the offer of a more personalised learning and individual support, inclusion policies hardly take into consideration the subjective/personal character of migrant children's intercultural adjustment and in particular their emotions. Noticeably, not all migrant children share the same life story and experience migration in the same way.

Subsequently, since their negative emotions are invisible in the official inclusion policies, migrant children tend to suppress them (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999) by employing passive coping approaches which reflect high behavioural inhibition through stressful internal regulatory processes (Eisenberg et al., 2002; Blair et al., 2004) resulting in high levels of anxiety and depression (Muris, Meesters & Spinder, 2003). Being extremely inhibited and, at the same time, predisposed to intense and frequent negative emotions, migrant children become vulnerable to behavioural problems (Blair et al., 2004) since their suppressed negative emotions may be expressed in disturbing (e.g. bullying) or submissive behaviour (e.g. victimization) (Zeman et al., 2006; Nikolaou et al., 2012; Kouider et al., 2014).

Simultaneously, schools and classrooms remain highly emotional places, where the diversity and intensity of emotions have a powerful affect on teacher -student relations (Schutz et al., 2007). According to the politics of emotions (Zembylas, 2007), emotions form the space for the teacher-student interaction and determine the attribution of power in their relationship, as power is located in who gets to express and who must repress various emotions.

Teachers, as persons and as professionals, are placed, not only in the centre of the educational effort for intercultural adjustment, but also in the centre of the migrant children's life. The teacher becomes the first “significant other” for these children in the new country (Vieno et al., 2009; Nikolaou et al., 2012), and this fact, unavoidably, leads to the formation of a power relation with their migrant students (Zembylas, 2007). Talking about negative emotions is not an easy task for children who experience loss and grief, while they have the challenge to conform to the expectations of a new teacher-student relation. Neither is emotion recognition and regulation in a complex educational setting that asserts its own social norms to deal with emotions and constructs its own emotional rules which are developed and legitimated, unofficially (Zembylas, 2007).

Therefore, as migrant children have usually little time to deal with their loss (Hamilton, 2013), a successful adjustment is greatly influenced by how quickly the teacher and child connect. A positive teacher-student rapport can help to promote emotional recognition and regulation that will enable the amelioration of their academic achievement (Blair et al., 2004) and enhance their pro-social peer interactions (Cefai, 2008). The teacher, thus, is the person who will “unlock” each child’s suppressed emotions and perceptions of the new situation in order to help them manage their emotions and become adjusted and oriented in the host society (Kouider et al., 2014).

Migration for children means not only a new “home” but a new meaning of life through reconstructing meaningful interpersonal relationships, as well. However, most of the proposed policies and guidelines barely refer to the powerful effect of the interpersonal teacher-student relation in intercultural adjustment (Council of Europe, 2009, 2010). Thus, what is required is an intervention on individual level through the construction of an interpersonal, meaningful and secure relationship that will enable the teacher to get to know the child’s reality, in the “here and now”, and to also detect the emotions that are derived and affect the coping process of the child in its effort to adjust. Such a relationship can be considered as the presupposition for an effective intervention aiming at enabling migrant children to recognise, express their emotions and learn how to regulate them constructively (Blair et al., 2004).

In addition, since emotional and social norms related to emotion recognition and regulation, are developed unofficially in schools, it is necessary for teachers to be aware of the official and unofficial ways of intervention, aiming towards emotion recognition and emotion regulation.

Official ways to facilitate emotion recognition and regulation refer to the use of the institutional capacities of the educational system (e.g. assistance and guidance by educational psychologists or school counsellors). Art therapy (Eaton, Kimberly & Widrick, 2007) and role-play activities (Kaloyirou & Lindsay, 2014; Kaloyirou, 2016), can be also used to facilitate, by means of identification and projection, the discussion on the recognition of negative emotions in the self and others. In this way, children can be encouraged to and helped to express their thoughts and feelings through gestures, words and pretend play (Greenspan & Wieder, 1998).

Unofficially, however, teachers intervene mainly within a “trial and error” approach in order to reach and understand their migrant students’ emotional state. In addition, the way difficulties in emotion regulation are connected with other developmental problems (e.g. attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder etc.) (Zeman et al., 2006), often leads teachers in dealing with migrant children within a special educational needs perspective. Apparently, teachers often seem to persist in habitual tendencies that are implied by these approaches.

Empathic understanding as “the process of understanding one’s subjective experience by vicariously sharing that experience while maintaining an observant stand” (Zinn, 1993), can become the first movement towards emotion recognition by enabling teachers to create an affective connection with their migrant students, based on compassion and understanding (Zembylas, 2007). In the first stages of relation building the teacher can observe the child during play (Denham, 1998). Being part of the child’s play the teacher can facilitate positive affect sharing and distress relief (Blair et al., 2004). In addition, through story telling or a discussion of a particular incident, children can recognise emotions in the self and others and express their thoughts about the consequences of solutions to interpersonal conflicts (Joseph & Strain, 2003).

When teachers adopt a thoughtful approach to the situation, through the child’s point of view, respect is established by the recognition and full acceptance of the child as a person, with a unique personality formed by a specific, often traumatic life history, which greatly

varies from the life history of the other children, even of the other migrant children. Respect is reinforced by warmth and unconditional positive regard, which enables the child to feel secure to talk about their life in the “here and now”, including their emotional difficulties in the process of intercultural adjustment (Ioannidou & Konstantinaki, 2008). They can also acknowledge the “corporeality of emotion” (Zembylas, 2007), that is to say the role of the body in emotional experience. In this way, empathic understanding becomes a valuable source of emotional knowledge that gets teacher and student together and turns the teacher-student relation into an “emotional refuge” (Zembylas, 2007) for migrant children, in which emotions are recognised, stated and accepted before they get regulated.

Emotion regulation, as a follow up of emotion recognition, is regarded as an ability build to conscience (Ioannidou & Konstantinaki, 2008), and, as such, it can be learned in interpersonal relationships developed in family and school (Matsumoto, Nakagawa & Yoo 2008). Such a relationship with the teacher should acknowledge that emotion regulation refers to the management of diverse systems and components including physiology, behaviour and social components (e.g. cultural values, personal goals).

Thus, during private meetings the physiological signs of negative emotions can be recognised and ways to regulate them through relaxation techniques (Pekrun, 2014) can be suggested. In addition, teachers can expose migrant students to “feeling words” by using these words to label affect in themselves and others in order to help them realise that actions can cause emotions (Denham, 1998). Teachers can also employ brainstorming and problem solving activities about situations where different types of emotion regulation strategies would be appropriate, in order to get children form a link between emotional behaviour and social outcomes (Zeman et al., 2006) and think through and resolve interpersonal conflicts effectively (Denham, 1998). In this way, teachers and migrant students can constantly negotiate classroom or school emotional rules, so that together they re-construct the ways their individual actions are constrained or expressed (Zembylas, 2007). Throughout this process migrant children are enabled to set personal goals regarding their adjustment and the role of their emotion regulation in achieving them.

Children’s individual differences

The effective application of the above mentioned strategies requires the consideration of individual differences that determine the level of difficulty each child may present in their adjustment (Cole, Michel & O'Donnel-Teti, 1994; Blair et al., 2004). These differences concern three main parameters that may affect emotion regulation in migrant children: the personal characteristics of the child, the nature of the social interactions (Zeman et al., 2006) and the role of culture (Matsumoto, 2006; Matsumoto et al., 2008).

To begin with, emotion regulation and recognition are influenced by biologically determined temperamental dispositions which predict the level of difficulty in the process of intercultural adjustment (Blair et al. 2004). In addition, the age of the child defines the child's cognitive ability to understand the causes and consequences of their emotional responses (Zeman et al., 2006; Cole et al., 2009). Age also reflects emotion socialization history in relation to gender. Gender socialization approaches often establish, not only which emotions are damped and which are expresses, but also lead to different methods of emotion regulation (Fivush et. al, 2000; Blair et al., 2004; Bajgar et al., 2005; Pascual, Conejero & Etxebarria, 2016).

Furthermore, the need to develop new relationships can become a significant source of stress for migrant children, as they face multiple challenges such as linguistic, cultural and social differences (Hamilton, 2013). Peer groups also assert their own hierarchy based on the popularity criteria set by the children according to their age. Thus, teachers need to be aware of the dominant group dynamics in their class or school in order to help migrant children to

set realistic interpersonal goals and achieve emotion regulation. Since it has been shown that suppression of emotion maintains hierarchy (Matsumoto et al., 2008), teachers may need to interfere by removing or managing environmental stimuli in order to prevent suppression of emotions or the victimization of migrant children.

Finally, since each social context is defined by a different culture which asserts its own values, rules, guidelines and norms concerning emotion regulation (Matsumoto et al., 2008), migrant children may have to live in two different cultures that often present contradictions in the way they perceive emotions. School culture and family culture set diverse rules and values to guide the child's decision to alter their emotional behaviour or suppress their emotions in order to become consistent with the social demands of the particular environment. The last happens especially when migrant children attempt to regulate their highly intensive negative emotions (e.g. anger and fear) (Rydell et al., 2003), by choosing to overcontrolling their intensity thorough suppression.

To prevent the harmful effects of culturally defined suppression of emotions, it is necessary for teachers to have a clear idea, not only of the migrant children's family culture with regards to emotion recognition and emotion regulation, but of the school's emotional rules and social norms as well, so that they can discuss with the child culturally flexible ways of emotion regulation and expression.

Challenges in teachers' role and recommendations for its empowerment:

Apparently, the role of teachers in emotion recognition and emotion regulation of migrant children, it is emotionally demanding for two reasons. Firstly, teachers are prompted to recognise the child's feelings, the causes of the feelings and to be able to participate in their emotional experience without becoming part of it (Keen, 2007). Secondly, as emotions are both regulated and regulating traits of personality, migrant children's emotions and the way they are expressed through behaviour patterns can also regulate the teachers emotions towards them and, in turn, teachers' practices and pedagogies (Cole et al., 2004). In terms of the politics of emotion, teachers and migrant students are prompted to deconstruct their power relation by a self-reflection on the ways they use to control and regulate their emotions (Zembylas, 2007).

In addition, taking part in the process of intercultural adjustment, teachers are often challenged by their role ambiguity (Koustelios, Theodorakis & Goulimaris, 2004) and role conflict (Brewer & Clippard, 2002). They may not be sure whether they are expected to provide language knowledge or emotional support or material means to migrant children. Moreover, the development of an affective connection with migrant students, challenges the stereotyped teacher -student relation, as it contradicts with what is officially expected from the teachers to do (e.g. teaching the new language, instead of dealing with emotions). In addition, teachers experience a role overload and a role conflict when they feel that they have to act not only as teachers, but as counsellors and social workers as well. Role ambiguity and role conflict can lead teachers to emotional exhaustion and professional burnt out, which easily can be attributed to the presence of migrant children in schools.

Finally, difficulties related to language barriers, shortage of professional interpreters, insufficient data accompanying migrant children, irregular attendance and curriculum pressures increase demands in teachers' time and make it hard for the teachers to address the individualised emotional needs of migrant children. These limitations, coupled with the greater number of migrant children concentrated in particular schools, may lead teachers to adopt inequitable practices in school (Hamilton, 2013) and enhance their stereotypes. Relevant studies have shown that teachers' stereotypes about expected behaviour, govern the way in which they interact and support migrant children (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Rutter, 2006). Teachers' stereotypes also concern the way teachers perceive their "emotional self" in

relation to their self concept as professionals. In their affective connection with their migrant students teachers are prompted to deconstruct their given professional self by challenging the rules that normalise their affective connections (Zembylas, 2007).

Evidently, the significance of the teachers' role within the process of their students' intercultural adjustment, requires relevant actions in political and educational level aiming to their empowerment and support.

Equal distribution of migrant children population, re-allocation of teachers' time in different tasks, and multi-agency support and guidance provided to teachers could help them deal effectively with their multi-dimensional role. In addition, efficient communication with the migrant children's parents or community mediators will enable teachers to acquaint knowledge of the family and community values which facilitate norms for emotion regulation (Matsumoto et al., 2008).

Most importantly, migrant children's presence in schools calls for appropriate teacher training programmes aiming towards a continuous professional and personal development, so that teachers can become adequately trained and resourced to recognise and understand the importance of emotion in effective pedagogy and intercultural adjustment. Such programmes require a shift to more experiential ways of investigating teachers' emotions, challenging their stereotypes and reflect on the ways the presence of migrant children in schools affects their professional self-concept and pedagogies (Blair, 2016).

Within this approach, teachers can focus on their daily activities and interactions with their migrant students' as a powerful source of learning about their self, as persons and as professionals, and how they relate to others (Hall & Hall, 1992). In small groups with a trained facilitator, teachers' can be able to examine their daily routines and the choices available to them in the way they deal with the recognition and regulation of their own feelings and how these choices are reflected in their interpersonal interactions, especially with their migrant students (Fowler, 2007). Through reflective techniques and narratives (e.g. keeping a diary and share their insights with a critical friend or a mentor), conscious or unconscious internalization of personal experiences will be revealed, school's emotional rules and norms will be examined (Zembylas, 2007) and teacher -learners will be provided with the time and chance to reflect, think, and act (Beard & Wilson, 2002) in an emotionally safe environment in which emotional freedom is enabled.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, emotion recognition and emotion regulation are basic prerequisites of migrant children's intercultural adjustment and as such they require careful consideration by educational policy makers and teachers. The teachers' role is exceptionally significant since they can facilitate emotion recognition and regulation by developing an interpersonal relationship with their migrant students based on empathy and understanding. Individual characteristics as well as the role of family and school culture have to be taken into consideration by teachers while dealing with migrant children's effort to achieve emotion recognition and regulation.

Despite various challenges related to the emotional demanding character of the task, it is only when the individual emotional needs of each migrant child have been addressed, in the "here and now" that intercultural adjustment can be realised. Thus, political decisions and appropriate teacher training programmes can enable teachers to become adequately trained and resourced to turn their relation with migrant children into a meaningful interpersonal relationship in which emotion recognition and regulation can be a valuable means for migrant children's intercultural adjustment and for teachers' personal and professional development.

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