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### **Emerging Scholar**

## **The Impact of Emotional Intelligence among Children with Disabilities and the Role of Professional Educators and Caregivers: A Literature Review**

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### **Abstract**

Throughout the process of child development, emotions evidence a vital role. This conceptual analysis focuses on the significant position of emotional intelligence and children with disabilities and other special needs. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a concept that describes the

ability to recognize personal emotions and how emotions trigger behaviors. Many educational settings, including kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and post-secondary institutions, and health care facilities remain as the forerunners of 1) providing age-appropriate learning, highlighting child development, 2) training the next generation of professionals to work with individuals with disabilities, and 3) promoting continuity of care in facilities tailored to guide and promote effective growth and development for persons with disabilities. Many post-secondary academic programs involve foundational EI techniques that focus on quality-based service delivery and preparing graduates for practice in diverse settings. In addition, an increasing number of graduates advance into alternative therapies such as physical or occupational therapy, speech therapy, and respiratory therapy to implement their acquired skillset to further support persons with disabilities. This premise assumes that a degree from a program that places emphasis on the foundations of EI instills graduates with an increased capacity for empathic relationships, a broad spectrum of understanding mental connections to physical conditions, and an insightful understanding of the world and how significant issues may be affecting individuals through an EI lens.

*Keywords:* Emotional intelligence, disability, special needs, alternative therapies, children

“Emotional Intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships.”

(Goleman, 1998, p. 317)

Just as the significance of life, emotions remain equally important in the development of children (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Through emotions, children can think, process, and behave accordingly within the environment (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). According to Gupta et al. (2020), exceptionally emotional intelligent children often have higher levels of motivation and emotional competence compared to other individuals. Inter-personal relations become especially valuable when considering the aspect of emotional intelligence. The purpose of this conceptual analysis is to explore four central ideas of 1) the general concept of emotional intelligence, 2) the impact of EI on children with disabilities, 3) the benefit of emotional intelligence for educators and parents, 4) and the potential for complementary disciplines and their application of EI with children. Disability care professionals in various disciplines can promote emotional regulation practices among young children and adolescents with disabilities through the foundations of EI. The current conceptual analysis considers the development of emotion regulation practices fostered by academic settings, human service professionals, and other allied health professionals. This discussion explores the benefits of emotional intelligence for the positive development of children across the diverse span of disabilities.

### **Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

First popularized in 1990, the term Emotional Intelligence is described by Salovey and Mayer as the ability to recognize, manage and understand emotions within oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1998) suggests that 80% of an individual’s life success relies on the

concept of emotional intelligence, whereas IQ reflects 20%. In theory, emotional intelligence is the collective blend of emotion and intelligence. EI, harmonizes individuals with the self and environment (Stanescu & Tasente, 2021). When an individual is emotionally intelligent, their behaviors afford the ability to effectively regulate their emotions (Sekhri et al., 2017). As this concept has become increasingly studied, it is apparent that skills of emotional intelligence may serve as a foundational undertone for enhanced student academic achievement and in society, along with the skills necessary for workplace success (Sekhri et al., 2017).

During infancy and early childhood years, children can build social and emotional skills (Bălaș-Baconschi & Dobrican, 2020). Emotional intelligence is also critical in the child's environment (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). As children rapidly grow, they experience increased complex emotions (Slusniene, 2019). Feelings of happiness, satisfaction, anger, sorrow, and worry or nervousness are some of the common emotions experienced by individuals (Slusniene, 2019). Around the ages of five and six, children typically have the capability to label their emotions and classify the source of the emotion (Slusniene, 2019). Emotions often uncovered among preschool aged children are pride, guilt/shame, and embarrassment or humiliation. A specific level of development and awareness of relationships is needed for children to effectively conquer challenging emotions (Slusniene, 2019). Attunement to another individual's thoughts and feelings are what emotions allow us to achieve (Sekhri et al., 2017). Emotions gives us insight to the behaviors of others, their intentions, and the personal ability to feel emotions prompted by the emotions of others (Sekhri et al., 2017). As children start to label their emotions, they begin to understand their meaning and reasons for occurring within their respective environments (Slusniene, 2019).

Panneerselvam and Sujathamalini (2014) suggests that three primary skills of emotional intelligence are 1) the effective use of emotions, 2) appropriate identification of emotions, and 3) proficient emotion regulation. When children indicate emotional intelligence, they can identify their inner emotions as well as those within relationships, in addition to the ability to effectively interpret situations (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). When children discover how to interpret the emotions of self as well as others earlier in life, the better they will effectively manage life challenges and proceed in the direction of success (Gupta et al., 2020).

It is suggested that children's academic success begins and is influenced by healthy emotional development (Rohaizad et al., 2014). Nisa et al. (2020) indicated elementary students' character and personality is highly impacted and developed by their level of emotional intelligence. Sekhri et al. (2017) also revealed that emotional intelligence is an emerging skill necessary for elevated achievement, positive actions, and the overall enhancement of success in life. Children who are in the transition-age endure many psychological changes (Nisa et al., 2020). Of the various changes, emotional change is the most vital. While the experiences are common and typical, they are essential to observe as many individuals operate with various levels of emotional intelligence (Nisa et al., 2020). To encourage the development of social, emotional, and academic interaction and development among children during the primary academic years, it is essential for

communities, families, and the school system to incorporate empirical methods (Payton et al., 2008).

The four dimensions of emotional intelligence include 1) perceiving emotion, 2) using/reasoning with emotion, 3) understanding emotion, and 4) managing emotion (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Effectively decoding others' emotions in pictures, faces, voices, and culture illustrate examples of perceiving emotion. Reasoning with emotion involves problem solving abilities and spontaneous thinking (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Understanding emotions occurs when individuals can understand the evolution of emotions and the general understanding of emotional languages (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Lastly, the regulation or management of emotions becomes the most valuable element in emotional intelligence (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Children who can manage emotions respond properly in their state of emotion (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Sakhri et al. (2017), also highlighted that emotional intelligence produces individual capabilities that promote control of oneself.

Billings et al. (2014) found that academic and emotional growth is highly significant for students, their parents, and educators during the phase of pre-adolescence. In addition, the period of adolescence, which is also considered a vulnerable developmental age, often involves a period of modification within their academic settings, social environment, and familial life (Mansy, Halim, & Wahab, 2017). With effective and appropriate supports through the periods of developmental transition and modification, emotionally intelligent children can progress to live happier, stronger, empathic lives that continue to manifest through adulthood as well (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). An additional element is that emotional intelligence has the potential to infuse elements of order and peace into ones' lives (Rohaizad & Kosnin, 2014).

### **EI in Children with Disabilities and Child Development**

Emotional intelligence is beneficial for the positive development of children across a diverse span of disabilities. Emotional intelligence is a significant factor that allows persons with disabilities to maximize their abilities which can allow them to develop a clear understanding of self and others (Al-Tal et al., 2017). Societal integration can be mediated with the presence of EI for persons with disabilities as well as effectively managing barriers that exist (Al-Tal et al., 2017). Children who are diagnosed with hyperactivity, learning disabilities, Autism, Intellectual and developmental disabilities, social difficulties, and those who are disadvantaged are situated within the classification of special needs (Gupta et al., 2020). Children who are impacted by such conditions are usually considered to have low levels of EI (Gupta et al., 2020).

The way children with special needs adjust and interact with their environment may rationalize the need for training in emotional intelligence (Kumar, 2013). Children have a unique and individual method to comprehending and navigating the outer world (Gupta et al., 2020). The environment is often interpreted by senses. When individuals lack specific essential senses, the common way of adjusting or interpreting the environment is different (Gupta et al., 2020). Typically, individuals can follow the model of others through observation. This task is not as

easy for others (Gupta et al., 2020). A variety of advances in resources in the past years cater to children with special needs. While these resources are specific to children with special needs, it is critical these resources also support emotional intelligence practices (Kumar, 2013). A few of the challenges children with special needs experience consist of aggressive behaviors, disability frustrations, self-esteem concerns and decreased levels of motivation (Kumar, 2013).

Kumar (2013) suggests children with special needs require motivation and empowerment to cope with their life course with a disability. Emotional intelligence is significant for the internal and external quality of life of the child with special needs (Kumar, 2013). Emotionally intelligent children with special needs display characteristics of elevated academic motivation and success, improvements in their effective organization and problem-solving abilities, capacities to develop strong bonds, capabilities to appropriately comprehend consequences and conflict resolution, and maintain optimistic outlooks on learning (Kumar, 2013). Kumar (2013) describes several examples illustrating the effects of empowering children with special needs to become emotionally intelligent. Table 1. below displays an overview of the outcomes highlighted by Kumar (2013).

**Table 1. Outcomes of Emotionally Intelligent Children with Special Needs**

Understand their own emotions
Take responsibility for the excellence of their life.
Respect others' emotions and to see both pleasant and unpleasant emotions as important feedback for keeping them on course.
To accept the reality and face the life with positive attitude
Consciously choose the content of their consciousness, thinking and speaking more positively about themselves, others, and their world, thus creating an experience of greater optimism, joy, and happiness.
Avoid emotional hijackings, thus persisting in the face of challenges and setbacks due to their disabilities.
Learn how to create more "flow" or peak experiences in their lives.
Improve relationships through empathy for and an understanding of the emotions of others

(Kumar, 2013, p. 64)

The concept of empathy provides a significant element when supporting the emotional intelligence of children with special needs (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). The emotional variable of empathy holds space for individuals to obtain insight into the feelings and thoughts of others (Sakhri et al., 2017). For example, children with Autism demonstrate challenges with social perception and grasping a general understanding of others. Their focus on other areas often impedes their ability to maintain a sense of consideration for others (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). In addition to the importance for children with special needs to receive empathy training, it is equally significant to consider empathy in relation to the social behavior of individuals without disabilities towards those with disabilities as well (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015).

Feelings of belonging and inclusion become essentially important among children with special needs especially considering inclusive classrooms. Given this fact, it is recommended that persons without disabilities participate in trainings that support best practices on how to effectively interact with persons with disabilities (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). This perspective is highly important in younger children, as their peers often lack an understanding of disabilities (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). Bratitsis and Ziannas (2015) highlight the existing disparity in the research concerning social training of persons without disabilities on the proper interaction with persons with disabilities. Therefore, trainings with a focus on empathy confirm benefits in supporting both children with special needs and those without. Empathy is a fundamental element of emotional intelligence and the agent of growth that can promote social interaction (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015).

***Learning Disabilities.*** EI and the learning acquisition of children is receiving increased attention in education. Two reliable indicators of achievement among all children are the presence of social and emotional skills. Included within the category of “all children” are children with learning disabilities (Singh, 2017). Research reflects that children with learning disabilities have lower levels of emotional intelligence (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). For example, Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini (2014) note common EI issues among children with learning disabilities such as how these children show difficulties with emotion expression both internal and external. More specifically, children experience the stigma associated with the emotional difficulties from anxiety, anger, frustration, etc. (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Singh (2017) indicated that children with learning disabilities may experience intense levels of frustration. Frustration from the disability and low self-esteem are other challenges children with low EI encounter. These challenges can be further reflected within the academic setting, causing difficulty with calming, awareness of non-verbal cues, lack of motivation, and relationship development (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Similar challenges were also identified within the research by Singh (2017) with the addition of challenges with children’s ability to calm oneself and interpret nonverbal cues. While these difficulties exist, parents and other support persons can play a major role in mediating the impact of experienced challenges (Singh, 2017). These challenges may be offset by highlighting the child’s growth as an individual versus only emphasizing academic accomplishments. Good emotional habits will be supported as well as the outlook for future success (Singh, 2017).

Using a remedial approach, educating children with learning disabilities may be expressed as an intervention method (Singh, 2017). A variety of instructional tools and strategies to mediate the difficulties experienced by the child must be incorporated. It is suggested that educators make efforts to decrease difficulty through an inclusive curriculum (Singh, 2017). Table 2 provides a few common strategies based on Kirk (1963) to support children with learning disabilities to best conquer the challenges associated with emotional concerns.

**Table 2. Strategies to Overcome Emotional Challenges among Children with Learning Disabilities in the Academic Setting**

Identify the specific needs of the child
Develop yearly goals and short-term objectives
Determine teaching style
Maintain instruction at the child's level
Provide extended time
Choose an effective reward system
Evaluate teaching tasks
Create opportunities for student success

(based on Kirk, 1963)

Panneerselvam and Sujathamalini (2014) emphasize how EI impacts children's learning disabilities. Employing an integrated instructional approach tailored for learning and emotions, has the potential to meet the needs of children with learning disabilities and increase their capacity for academic and life success (Panneerselvam & Sujathamalini, 2014). Incorporating emotional learning within the academic setting, supports children with special needs to feel empowered and able to regulate emotions effectively. In academic settings, teachers intentionally incorporate strategies that promote an all-inclusive setting. Seven effective strategies from Panju (2008) as cited in Kumar (2013) are highlighted for educators to utilize. These seven strategies are reflected within the acronym 'ELEVATE.' The acronym is outlined below:

- "(E) environment for learning
- (L) language of emotions
- (E) establishing relationships
- (V) validating feelings
- (A) active engagement
- (T) thinking skills
- (E) empower through feedback"

Incorporating the strategies and techniques of ELEVATE within academic classrooms provides educators with tools to transition from the consistent position of conduct management to more meaningful interaction with student learners (Kumar, 2013). Emotionally intelligent classrooms reflect an environment where the educator can 1) mediate only when required, 2) ensure time is provided for students, 3) develop clear and concise objectives to distribute to students, 4) foster innovation and personal growth, and 5) incorporate laughter and fun within the classroom environment (Kumar, 2013).

**Hearing Loss.** In children with hearing loss, issues with their social, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral abilities may exist because of difficulties with their ability to listen which is often

accompanied by communication issues (Yasin et al., 2012). These concerns remain also challenging and stressful for their parents/caregivers as well (Pujar & Patil, 2019). Pujar and Patil (2019) describe a significant effect identified in age, socioeconomic status, and ordinal position on emotional intelligence among children with hearing loss. Compared to children categorized as typical, those with a hearing loss are at a higher risk of experiencing behavioral challenges, encountering emotional disturbance, and performing lower academically (Pujar & Patil, 2019). Children's inability to communicate feelings effectively to parents and other individuals ultimately impedes development of high emotional intelligence (Pujar & Patil, 2019). When considering the presence of bullying in the school setting and the inclusion of children with a hearing loss, emotional intelligence can assist with such issues in the academic environment (Al-Jawaldeh, 2012). The development of educational programs along with EI specific interventions offer families and educators the tools necessary to influence higher levels of emotional intelligence in children with a hearing loss (Pujar & Patil, 2019).

Al-Tal et al. (2017) offer several recommendations for individuals with sensory disabilities in which to engage to enhance their levels of emotional intelligence. One specific recommendation is for individuals to freely express their emotions through practices of drawing, acting, and using music as avenues to enhance emotional intelligence (Al-Tal et al., 2017). It is important to offer encouragement for the EI roles family members play in helping the child as well as other natural supports. In order for individuals with sensory loss to develop feelings of security and psychological satisfaction, it is necessary to acknowledge and take account of the assistance afforded these students. This adult support provides the potential to elevate children's levels of emotional intelligence (Al-Tal et al., 2017).

***Vision Loss.*** Anxiety is highly present during adolescence among children with vision loss. During this period, adolescents navigate both developmental difficulties as well as the challenges associated with vision loss (Huurre & Aro, 2000, as cited in Mansy et al., 2017). Visual ability is a critical component to gathering information about the world. When an individual's visual capacity is diminished, their opportunities to experience the world become restricted or eliminated (Mansy et al., 2017). Given the nature of vision loss, an individual may face stressors to include intense social and emotional effects that extend beyond the individual into external factors such as family and the individual's community (Mansy et al., 2017).

Adolescents diagnosed with vision loss may endure maladjustment, peer isolation, lack of peer communication, and low self-esteem (Mansy et al., 2017). Compared to peers without vision loss, those with diagnosed vision loss evidence difficulties with social interactions and indicate spending considerable amounts of time isolated (Pfeiffer & Pinquart, 2011). Parween (2015) revealed individuals who were blind (not congenital) received higher scores on the EI scale versus those individuals whose visual loss is congenital. These results validate the importance for early intervention efforts in supporting the development of emotional intelligence earlier in life among individuals with congenital vision loss (Parween, 2015).



## **Emotionally Intelligent Educators and Parenting**

***Emotionally Intelligent Educators.*** Over the years, the concept of emotional intelligence has gained momentum, particularly, in education (Marti et al., 2020). Sakhri et al. (2017) acknowledged that educational institutions are electing to integrate the concept of emotion intelligence with the systemic intention to enhance academic and social outcomes. As it is important to promote emotional intelligence among students with disabilities, it is equally important to train emotionally intelligent educators in the classrooms.

Daniel Goleman highlighted the need for educational settings to aim for increased development of emotional intelligence (Gupta et al., 2020). According to a study by Allan (2016, as cited in Slusniene, 2019) it is equally significant for children to learn how to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions just as it is imperative to attain the educational goals of effective reading, writing, and mathematics. To best implement strategies and techniques to efficiently increase EI among children and adolescents, efforts towards recruiting competent and empathic support professionals are vital. Characteristics of an emotionally intelligent educator include: “Infectiously optimistic, a good listener, demonstrates commitment, validates other’s feelings, and emotionally resilient” (Kumar, 2013, p. 64). These characteristics are essential to develop and maintain as Kumar (2013) explains emotional intelligence as a dynamic process that allows individuals to become aware of strategies to meet personal needs as well as to consider the perspectives of others. Thus, such characteristics and individual skill level are significant in the academic setting.

To incorporate creativity and promote student engagement and empowerment, educators consider available applications to support efforts to create social and emotional learning (SEL) environments. Examples of applications include: The Social Express, Middle School Confidential, IF (emotional IQ game), GoNoodle, Emotionary, Avokiddo, and Touch and Learn Emotions. Weissberg et al. (2015) describe how SEL interventions evidence the capability to influence the development of five competencies regarded as significant for academic and life success. The five competency areas include: 1) self-awareness, 2) self-management, 3) social awareness, 4) relationship skills, and 5) responsible decision making. Previous research studies suggest the resources embedded within SEL interventions promote positive development (Taylor et al., 2017). To further the efforts of creating emotionally intelligent children in the academic environment, the home environment also provides a role in the development of emotional intelligence in children.

***Emotionally Intelligent Parenting.*** To support the development of emotional intelligence in children, it is important parents coach children to formulate positive satisfactory responses to emotions in the presence of unpleasant feelings (Katanani & Mas'oud, 2017). Katanani and Mas'oud (2017) recommend avoiding punishment when their child makes a mistake as it may result in the child developing an understanding that all mistakes are treated in that manner. It is important to provide opportunities for creative expression and leisure time while focusing on positive child attributes (Katanani & Mas'oud, 2017).

Of the many parenting styles, the authoritative and emotion-coaching styles remain a popular method used to boost emotional intelligence in children (Segrin & Flora, 2019). The authoritative parenting style allows the parents to be highly responsive to their children along with mild to high-level demandingness (Segrin & Flora, 2019). Parents engage with their children and show appropriate affection. Parents outline clear expectations for the child and offer rich justification for children to become aware of significant values (Segrin & Flora, 2019). In the emotion-coaching style, parents intentionally address negative emotions expressed by the child through acts of validation and mindfulness of the expressed emotions. Next, parents use verbal communication to support the child in understanding how to best navigate the adverse emotion while, at the same time, identifying appropriate problem-solving skills to determine alternative behavioral responses (Segrin & Flora, 2019). Research suggests that parenting styles grounded in the emotion-coaching style for a portion of the time allows children to develop increased levels of emotional intelligence and improved social functioning (Segrin & Flora, 2019).

In addition to the academic environment tailored for younger children (e.g., K-8), other areas prove beneficial in promoting emotional intelligence. For example, a variety of academic disciplines exist at the post-secondary level responsible for training the next generation of human service professionals to provide comprehensive services grounded on targeting the whole person. Emotional intelligence can be a foundational component to guide a diverse set of disciplines within their curriculum as well as other settings such as health care, counseling, and other allied health professions. The following section provides an overview of alternative disciplines and settings where incorporating emotional intelligence principles is assumed beneficial and supportive in the development of the whole child.

### **Complementary Disciplines and Their Application of Emotional Intelligence Interventions**

Many disciplines, regardless of mental or physical focus, often share the common goal of individual wellness, ranging from heart health to emotional awareness. Employment in the human service profession is comprised of a variety of job titles, roles, and responsibilities (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). A few job titles include: educators, counselors, social workers, nurses, and other human service and allied health professionals (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). Experienced emotions clearly correlate with employment within the human services profession (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). Intrapersonal and interpersonal skills evidence two key components human service providers are expected to implement within their style of service provision (Morrison, 2007). Individuals providing supports within the human services and overall helping profession often experience emotionally charged work circumstances that call for the skill of emotional intelligence for personal control and regulation (Leslie & Davis, 2015).

Many academic collegiate human service programs focus on a variety of learning outcomes and objectives to best prepare students to navigate the workforce post-graduation. For example, undergraduate rehabilitation education (URE) programs focus on a variety of disabilities and other related issues and concerns. Due to the various URE programs across the globe and different areas of focus, one can assume that several URE programs have embedded components that prepare students to utilize and practice EI across many professional disciplines. Known

skills taught in URE (respective to the author's location), specifically EI practices, enable aspiring disability care professionals to assist individuals in reaching optimal emotional and physical wellness goals. URE endeavors to meet the needs of individuals in need through advocacy, empowerment, and individually tailored supports. The goal is to support individuals to reach their maximum potential and enhance their overall quality of life. Emotional intelligence is essential in supporting professionals in this role to best meet the needs of the population served.

It is important to support individuals through an emotional intelligence lens. Alternate disciplines such as pediatric IPC (Integrated primary care) and ICF-IID (Intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities) care also strive to navigate clients toward a degree of wellness, both mentally and physically, thus linking all disciplines to the benefit of EI and emotion regulation practices. Proficiency in EI instills graduates with an increased capacity to foster emotional regulation practices for their young clients with disabilities, their families, and the larger community. Because of the relevance to the advantages of the EI curriculum and the direct correlation to emotion regulation implementation, literature that generally discusses the expectations, performances, requirements, tasks, and functions of certain disciplines remain also included within this analysis.

Continuing with a post-secondary context, students may matriculate into for example, an integrated pediatric primary care setting to work directly with children with disabilities. These care professionals are in a unique position to promote emotional well-being practices with their young clients, while also monitoring and treating their diagnoses. IPC involves both medical care specialists, such as physicians (MDs or DOs), physician assistants (PAs), and family nurse practitioners (FNPs), as well as behavioral health specialists. Some types of behavioral health specialists working in IPC settings may include professional counselors (LPCs/LCMHCs), marriage/family therapists (LCMFTs), and clinical social workers (LCSWs) (Reitz, Fifield, & Whistler, 2011). Together, these providers can identify potential emotional barriers and employ a preventative emotion regulation plan (Lines, 2019).

Children with disabilities may demonstrate increased difficulty verbalizing their feelings and emotions (Genik et al., 2020), which can lead to increased stress regarding the reaction to and expression of their emotions. It is because of this stress that the promotion of emotion regulation practices be implemented in pediatric patients with disabilities. Emotion regulation techniques may be taught in a myriad of ways, although some methods may prove more beneficial for some children than others. The 'RULER' approach, for example, may be especially advantageous for school-aged children. The 'RULER' approach utilizes an acronym for five key emotional skills. Those skills include *recognizing* emotions, *understanding* cause and effect of emotions, *labeling* emotions, *expressing* emotions effectively, and *regulating* emotions (Hoffmann et al., 2020).

While the RULER approach is generally utilized and taught in school settings, children with disabilities may benefit from direction from a member of their health care team specializing in behavioral health. It is critical that the behavioral health specialist with experience with EI be adequately prepared to anticipate emotional needs of clients, as EI focuses on the triggering of

behaviors via emotions (Lewis, 2004). When children, especially those living with disabilities, experience unfamiliar or unpleasant emotions and lack the ability to respond effectively, the child may become increasingly frustrated and feel misunderstood. Emotion regulation skills can equip children with the tools they need to become familiar and comfortable in dealing with new emotions, and care providers in IPC settings may have one of the best opportunities to enhance a child's life with emotion regulation skills.

Graduates may also seek positions in direct care facilities for those living with disabilities. Some children live in Intermediate Care Facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ICF-ID). ICF-ID is an option for Medicaid beneficiaries that allows individuals to reside in facilities that provide comprehensive and individualized care to meet all medical, behavioral, and interpersonal needs, as well as promote independence and functional skills (Waldman et al., 2014). Generally, children with intellectual disabilities living in ICFs represent limited cognitive capacities, significantly reduced adaptive skills, and evidenced communication deficits (Friedman & Kalichman, 2014). Due to these accompanying factors, it is understandably difficult for these individuals to cope with their emotions. Berg et al. (2015) provide an analysis indicating children with disabilities become twice as likely to suffer from clinical depression in comparison with their counterparts without disabilities.

Children residing in ICF-ID settings could substantially benefit from emotion regulation practices being implemented with methods tailored to the ability-level of the individual. Emotion regulation can be exceptionally difficult for children with sensory processing disorders and executive functioning delays (Morin, 2021). Therefore, the mode of delivery and instruction may require increased time and effort on the part of the support professional. It is important to note that approaches generally used to foster emotion regulation in other settings may not be effective or appropriate for children living in ICF-ID settings. There remain many areas to target before ICF-ID residents can reach any level of emotional awareness.

Supporting emotion regulation in this setting can involve providing structure and consistency, to avoid unexpected emotions (Foothills Academy, 2018). It may also involve modeling self/emotion regulation in guiding each child through new sensory experiences and introducing calming strategies, such as grounding activities (i.e., deep breathing, visual imagery, etc.), social supports, and mental breaks, which can consist of familiar and enjoyable tasks, such as coloring and listening to music. It may also prove beneficial to use positive reinforcement and praise. Immediate and specific feedback can also evoke positive learning experiences as well as interpersonal growth. It is important for the support professional to focus not on the overall result, but rather the level of effort the child applies to recognizing and expressing their emotions (Foothills Academy, 2018). By implementing a safe emotional space for residents and encouraging self-awareness in emotions, ICF-ID staff and behavioral support specialists can develop emotion regulation techniques using subtle, yet constructive methods.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

It is important that educators, clinicians, and other human service and health care providers consider the discussed factors within this analysis. This information may be especially beneficial when instructing individuals to communicate with students and/or clients, and in perceiving their own emotions in educational and clinical situations. The authors of the current analysis recommend future areas of research that include exploring the effect of emotional intelligence among a more diverse disability community. For example, research on emotional intelligence and physical disabilities, along with mental health may contribute greatly to the current body of knowledge. Additionally, Mansy et al. (2017) motioned for educational programs to be tailored to influence the development of protective factors that stimulate problem-solving abilities, positive coping mechanisms, and a realistic outlook that further motivates resiliency among both persons with and without disabilities.

As continued emphasis is placed on enhancing the development of EI in children, an additional recommendation is to implement psychoeducational programs for parents and educators that highlight the challenges confronting adolescents during the entry into the adolescent period. During this time, emotional challenges can present as adolescents may be facing the pressures of finding and navigating their way within society, in addition to encountering physical and emotional changes that are influenced via puberty (Peres et al., 2020). It is not only important for parents and educators to learn about adolescents' experiences, but it remains equally important to learn techniques and skills to support and empower adolescents, along with procedures for the support persons to overcome any stressors that accompany the point of providing supports (Mansy et al., 2017).

The inclusion of emotional intelligence principles within curriculum will support and strengthen pedagogical aims and create a comprehensive curriculum that embodies the foundational principals of EI (Parween, 2015). Critically, the intentional inclusion of EI in the curriculum to enrich teaching practices to effectively meet the distinct needs of diverse students with disabilities is a primary goal (Parween, 2015). This can be assumed to be effective at the post-secondary level as well. Additionally, the various health care, counseling and other professional providers and practitioners offering supports to children with disabilities and other special needs can benefit from adapting practices to include more EI centered processes.

## **CONCLUSION**

The helping profession plays a major role through advocacy, empowerment, and effective strategies that bolster positive development of many individuals' overall quality of life. Emotional intelligence is a concept that has gained tremendous momentum within the helping profession and is an essential skill for many, especially children and adolescents. While it is important for professionals to acknowledge the value of the emotional intelligence of children and adolescents, children with disabilities are also a worthy focus area to promote inclusivity in strategies for academic success for all children and adolescents. The disability population is often underserved and greatly benefit from the advocacy and empowerment efforts of many human service professionals.

Educators and other professionals within the helping profession can also benefit from personal training in emotional intelligence as they are in roles that often inspire positive child progression, success, and overall development. The trend of emotional intelligence is being identified across a range of academic disciplines and alternative settings. Examples of disciplines that may benefit from EI application consist of (not an exhaustive list): schools, pediatric IPC (Integrated primary care) and ICF-IID (Intermediate care facilities), hospitals, behavioral health agencies, counseling, and social work. As the concept is known to be addressed across various disciplines, emotional intelligence is a premier topic among many mental health professionals who work with adolescents (Adibsereshki, et al., 2019). Academic disciplines such as URE also provides future disability (and other alternative human service areas) generalists the skills needed for self-awareness instruction, appropriate emotional expression guidance for young clients with disabilities, emotion management, and social awareness in clinical practice settings. Generally, an idea is to support the next generation of leaders to not only thrive, but also support others in their own development of positive emotional intelligence.

The education system plays a vital role in supporting children and adolescents to develop positive and healthy emotional intelligence. Furthermore, educators have a major charge to self-reflect on their own emotional intelligence in addition to nurturing that of the children and adolescents they serve. Emotionally intelligent educators are often able to motivate their students and enter the classroom with an enhanced understanding of their diverse students. Together with families, communities, and other sources of natural supports, educators can imprint on the early childhood experiences of emotional intelligence among children and adolescents. In addition to the role of educators and other human service professionals, parental involvement may have a huge impact on bolstering positive child emotional intelligence by creating a parental/caregiver support system that concentrates on the whole child and not merely academics alone. Parental responses and the overall parenting style play a role in child development of effective EI. Of the many parenting styles, the authoritative and emotion-coaching styles continue as a trendy method used to enhance emotional intelligence in children (Segrin & Flora, 2019).

Overall, emotional intelligence is a critical factor in an individual's ability to experience academic success and professional growth and accomplishments (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015). In the presence of the many societal pressures on children of all abilities, their families, the community at large, emotional intelligence is a key ingredient that has the potential to create opportunities for future success. The role of emotional intelligence in the professional development of educators, disability care workers, and other allied health and human service professionals is highly significant, particularly, how its principles translate into promoting the positive development and outlook of the whole child, especially of children with disabilities.

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