



Theory and practice of education

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**Theory and practice of emotional perception of the world
by preschool children: foreign experience**

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Abstract: The article *aims to* analyze and generalize foreign theoretical and practical approaches to the problem of the preschool child's emotional perception of the world. **Methods.** The study used a number of theoretical methods that provided a systematic study of scientific principles and practices related to the emotional perception of the world by preschool children in a foreign educational environment. **Results.** It has been established that in foreign psychological and pedagogical literature, the term “emotional perception” is used less frequently than categories such as “emotion perception” or “emotion recognition”, “emotional awareness”, and “emotional understanding”. However, in research on emotional intelligence, cognitive psychology, and neuropsychology, the concept under study is identified as a fundamental component of the emotional sphere. It has been found that theoretical frameworks such as emotional intelligence theory, attachment theory, and sociocultural approaches have offered significant explanatory models for



*understanding the mechanisms of a child's emotional perception of the world. The conducted analysis of sources indicates that the development of emotional perception of the world in preschoolers is effective provided that a systematic approach is taken: involving teachers, family, and creating a favorable environment. The most successful psychological and educational practices are built on respect for children's feelings, recognizing their significance, and teaching constructive ways to interact with the emotional world. **Conclusions.** Preschoolers' emotional understanding of the world can be purposefully developed through structured programs and everyday teaching practices. The most sustainable results are achieved when interventions involve both children and adults (teachers and parents), are integrated into daily routines, and are adapted to the cultural context. Ukrainian preschools can benefit from adapting such structured programs (RULER, PATHS, emotion coaching), combining them with local traditions and resources.*

Keywords: *emotional perception, emotions, emotional development, emotional intelligence, preschool children, curriculum, social and emotional learning.*

Теорія та практика емоційного сприйняття світу дітьми дошкільного віку: зарубіжний досвід

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Анотація: *Метою статті є аналіз та узагальнення зарубіжних теоретичних і практичних підходів до проблеми емоційного сприйняття світу*



дитиною дошкільного віку. **Методи.** У дослідженні використано низку теоретичних методів, які забезпечили системне опрацювання наукових положень і практик, пов'язаних з емоційним сприйняттям світу дітьми дошкільного віку у зарубіжному освітньому просторі. **Результати.** Встановлено, що в зарубіжній психолого-педагогічній літературі термін «емоційне сприйняття» використовується рідше, ніж такі категорії, як «сприйняття емоцій» або «розпізнавання емоцій», «емоційна усвідомленість» та «емоційне розуміння». Однак у дослідженнях з емоційного інтелекту, когнітивної психології та нейропсихології досліджуване поняття визначено як фундаментальний компонент емоційної сфери. З'ясовано, що такі теоретичні основи, як теорія емоційного інтелекту, теорія прихильності та соціокультурні підходи, запропонували значні пояснювальні моделі для розуміння механізмів емоційного сприйняття світу дитиною. Здійснений аналіз джерел свідчить про те, що розвиток емоційного сприйняття світу в дошкільнят є ефективним за умови системного підходу: залучення педагогів, сім'ї та створення сприятливого середовища. Найбільш успішні психолого-педагогічні практики побудовані на повазі до почуттів дитини, визнанні їхньої значущості та навчанні конструктивним способам взаємодії з емоційним світом. **Висновки.** Емоційне розуміння світу у дітей дошкільного віку може бути цілеспрямовано розвиватися за допомогою структурованих програм та повсякденної педагогічної практики. Найбільш стійкі результати досягаються, коли втручання залучають як дітей, так і дорослих (вчителів та батьків), інтегруються в щоденний розпорядок дня та адаптуються до культурного контексту. Українські заклади дошкільної освіти можуть отримати користь від адаптації таких структурованих програм (RULER, PATHS, емоційний коучинг), поєднуючи їх з місцевими традиціями та ресурсами.



***Ключові слова:** емоційне сприйняття, емоції, емоційний розвиток, емоційний інтелект, діти дошкільного віку, навчальна програма, соціально-емоційне навчання.*

Problem statement. The problem of the child's emotional perception of the world has increasingly attracted the attention of researchers in psychology, pedagogy, and related areas, as it constitutes one of the key determinants of personality formation and socialization. Emotional perception during childhood is not limited to spontaneous affective responses but represents a complex cognitive-emotional process that mediates the child's interaction with reality, influences the development of value orientations, and shapes the foundations of moral and social behavior. Theoretical studies [1; 2] and empirical findings [3; 4] underscore that the capacity to adequately perceive, interpret, and regulate emotions forms the basis for psychological well-being, effective communication, and the acquisition of social competencies in later life

At the level of practice, numerous international programs and interventions aimed at fostering emotional competence in children have been developed and successfully implemented in educational settings. These include structured social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula, methods of cultivating empathy and resilience, and strategies for enhancing self-regulation and interpersonal understanding. The synthesis of theoretical positions with evidence-based pedagogical practices makes foreign experience particularly valuable for developing holistic approaches to supporting children's emotional development.

Analysis of recent research and publications. During the past decades, there has been growing interest in facilitating children's emotional development. As J. Durlak, C. Domitrovich, R. Weissberg and T. Gullotti [1] note that social and emotional learning is the process by which children and youth develop and acquire a wide range of social, emotional, and behavioral skills, including ethical ones, typically through the development of strengths-based skills, such as developing emotional self-



awareness or learning social problem-solving strategies. According to J. Heckman and T. Kautz [2] early social and emotional competence is considered the foundation of healthy development because it is associated with later life outcomes that extend into adulthood.

Meta-analytic reviews by C. Aubrey and K. Ward [3] and by D. Murano, J. Sawyer and A. Lipnevich [4] show that universal and targeted SEL programs in preschools, when implemented sustainably, produce statistically significant effects, such as: improved social and emotional skills, reduced behavioral problems, and a positive impact on subsequent academic achievement. Systemizing the findings of a large review of studies and meta-analyses, it can be concluded that systemic SEL interventions represent an effective and cost-effective investment in early childhood development.

N. Ensenberg-Diamant, R. Hassin and H. Aviezer [5] argue that the study of children's emotional perception is characterized by an interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from developmental psychology, affective neuroscience, cultural psychology, and educational sciences. This view is supported by B. Dobia, L. Arthur, P. Jennings, D. Khlentzos, R. Parada, S. Roffey and N. Sheinman [6].

Today, in foreign psychological and pedagogical literature, the term “emotional perception” is used less directly than categories such as emotion perception or emotion recognition (the ability to recognize and interpret emotional cues from other people [5], emotional awareness, and emotional understanding. However, within the framework of research on emotional intelligence, cognitive psychology, and neuropsychology, the concept under study is identified as a fundamental component of the emotional sphere. Without a developed perception of emotions, subsequent levels of emotional intelligence are impossible: understanding, using and regulating emotions [7].

C. Izard [8] considered the perception of emotions as a child's innate ability to differentiate basic emotional expressions (joy, fear, anger, etc.). The psychologist [8]

emphasized that already at preschool age, children begin to associate external emotional manifestations with internal states.

Modern neuropsychological research (e.g., R. Adolphs [9]; D. Martin, G. Slessor, R. Allen, L. Phillips & S. Darling [10]; C. Jaksic & K. Schlegel [11]). views emotional perception as a function associated with the work of the amygdala and other structures of the limbic system. For a child, this means a gradual maturation of the neural mechanisms responsible for processing emotional signals.

Thus, in the works of foreign researchers, emotional perception is viewed as the ability to recognize and interpret emotional signals (in oneself and others), associating them with the situation and internal states. This ability is the foundation of emotional intelligence, social competence, and a child's psycho-emotional well-being.

Identification of previously unresolved parts of the general problem. Despite the growing body of foreign research on the child's emotional perception of the world, several aspects of the general problem remain insufficiently addressed. There is no universally accepted conceptual framework that clearly distinguishes "emotional perception" from related constructs such as emotional intelligence or empathy. Empirical studies tend to focus on isolated age groups and rarely provide a longitudinal perspective. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons are fragmentary, with a notable predominance of Western data and limited integration of findings from other cultural traditions. Finally, the translation of theoretical insights into educational practice remains sporadic, with little evidence regarding the effectiveness of specific pedagogical strategies and programs.

Formulation of the objectives of article (setting the task). The purpose of the article is to analyze and generalize foreign theoretical and practical approaches to the problem of the preschool child's emotional perception of the world. By integrating key conceptual frameworks with theoretical methods, the article seeks to contribute to a deeper scholarly understanding of the phenomenon under study and to provide a basis for its adaptation within contemporary educational practice in Ukraine.



Presentation of the main research material. Emotional perception of the world (emotional awareness, recognition, regulation, and empathy) lays the foundation for social skills, academic motivation, and mental health later in life. During preschool education, a child's brain is particularly plastic, and everyday interactions with adults and peers shape a child's repertoire of emotional responses and the ability to understand the feelings of others [8].

In foreign psychology and pedagogy, the formation of emotional perception is associated with the concepts of emotional intelligence (J. Mayer and P. Salovey [7]; D. Goleman [12]), SEL, as well as with the theory of attachment by J. Bowlby and M. Ainsworth [13]. The last of the three mentioned, the theory of attachment, explains how a child's first relationships with his parents shape his emotional perception of the world, determining a sense of security, trust, and the ability to emotionally regulate. This mechanism is formed as a biological instinct to seek closeness and protection, and its quality (secure or insecure attachment) affects a person's subsequent relationships with himself and others, as well as his mental health and well-being. The basic principles of the theory of attachment were formulated in the 1960s-80s by clinical psychologists – J. Bowlby and his student M. Ainsworth [13]. These scientists argued that the attachment that develops in a child to his mother in the first year of life forms the foundation of his future personality. The feeling of security and unconditional acceptance that the mother conveys to the child becomes part of his self-awareness and runs like a red thread through all further emotional and personal development.

As far as the concept of emotional intelligence [12] is concerned, it has profoundly shaped contemporary debates on children's emotional development. Emotional intelligence is viewed as “the capacity to control and regulate one's own feelings and those of others and use them as a guide for thought and action” [14, p. 440]. Emotional intelligence is conceptualized as the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others. Within childhood development, it is seen as foundational for both academic success and social functioning. This model has been



widely adopted in programs of SEL in preschool education institutions throughout the world and across the United States as well. SEL started in the 1960s at the Yale School of Medicine in its Child Study Center as the process by which children develop and learn a broad range of social, emotional, and behavioural skills [15], typically through the promotion of strength-based skills such as developing emotional self-awareness or learning social problem-solving strategies. Early social and emotional competency is seen as a foundation for healthy development as it is associated with later life outcomes extending into adulthood, such as success in the labour market [2; 16], and protection against the potential emergence of later mental health difficulties [17].

Additionally, SEL programmes are typically seen to be embedded in the context and wider environment of the school setting through the use of multiple and co-ordinated strategies, including activities across curriculum teaching, emphasis on wider school ethos and environment, and family and community engagement [18; 19].

Recent contributions by developmental psychologists highlight the progression of emotion reasoning across infancy and early childhood [20]. Children move from primitive perceptual reactions and valence-based distinctions toward more complex conceptual categories of emotions, integrating contextual cues and social information. This approach demonstrates that emotional perception is not a passive sensory process, but an active interpretative and cognitive activity.

We have found out that today there are such educational programs as RULER of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence [21], PATHS (Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies) [22] and Emotion Coaching of the Gottman Institute [23; 24] thanks to which teachers and parents successfully solve the problems of emotional perception of the world by preschool-age children. Let's take a closer look at these three programs.

1. RULER is an systematic evidence-based approach to SEL, which was developed by the team of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. RULER is an acronym for five emotional intelligence skills; in its name R stands for recognizing



one's own emotions and emotions of others, U – understanding the causes and effects of emotions, L –labeling emotions exploiting detailed vocabulary, E – expressing emotions according to cultural norms and social context, R– regulating emotions using helpful strategies For early childhood, RULER offers play-based lessons and core rituals that are integrated into daily classroom routines. The goal is to expand children's emotional vocabulary and teach them to measure and regulate emotions in the classroom and at home. The program is designed to work with the entire preschool community (teachers and families) in: understanding the value of emotions, building the skills of emotional intelligence, and creating and maintaining positive climates in educational institutions. Recognizing the value of emotions in effective daily routines, RULER seeks to embed the principles of emotional intelligence into the immune system of every school, informing how leaders lead, teachers teach, students learn, and families support children [21].

2. PATHS (Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies) – innovative curriculum for kindergarten through sixth grade (ages 5 to 12) is utilized by educators and counselors as a multiyear prevention model [22]. The PATHS program is a curriculum that aims to promote emotional and social competencies and to reduce aggression and behavior problems in children. It is delivered through short lessons given two to three times a week over the year. The program is based on the principle that understanding and regulating emotions are central to effective problem solving. The lessons according to the PATHS program focus on: 1) self-control, 2) emotional literacy, 3) social competence, 4) positive peer relations, and 5) interpersonal problem-solving skills. “Research has shown that the PATHS curriculum is effective as both a prevention and an intervention program. These dual functions are of practical value to educators. Today's classrooms are generally a mixture of children who are in need of intervention as well as children who are not “at risk,” but can nevertheless benefit from prevention programs to reinforce healthy functioning” [23, p. 3].



3. Emotion Coaching Program focuses on adult emotional analysis: attentive recognition and validation of a child's feelings, assistance in verbalizing them, and the joint selection of regulation strategies. This approach is successfully used both in parenting practice and has been adapted for preschool teachers [24].

American psychologist and professor at the University of Washington John Gottman [25] conducted several scientific studies that led him to conclude that the key to good parenting lies in understanding the emotional origins of the problematic behavior of their children. He identified four “types” of parents that reflect stereotypes often acquired in childhood:

1) ignoring parents: withdraw, ridicule, or control all of their children’s negative emotions, feel insecure and afraid of losing control, use distraction techniques, perceive children’s emotions as toxic or unhealthy, and use the passage of time as a panacea for solving problems;

2) parents who are critical and judgmental, controlling, and authoritarian, overly concerned with disciplining their children while at the same time ignoring the meaning of their children’s emotional expressions;

3) parents who operate in a non-interventionist manner (overly indulgent, offer little or no guidance in solving problems or understanding children’s emotions, set no limits on behavior, encourage “holding back” emotions until they are out of sight);

4) parents-emotional coaches – ones who are able to truly identify with and understand their children. The five basic steps of emotional coaching include:

- becoming aware of child’s emotions;
- recognizing the expression of child’s emotions as an ideal moment to connect and teach their children;
- actively listening with empathy and the ability to identify their children’s emotions and feelings in different situations;
- providing support, encouraging their children to learn to express their emotions in words;



- setting limits, helping their children solve problems or cope appropriately with unpleasant situations.

Consequently, a child's ability to understand and regulate their emotions will help them succeed in life in many different ways. They will have more self-confidence, cope better with social and academic situations, and even be healthier physically [24].

Obviously, all the programs described above are based on several common principles:

- systematic approach – working not only with the child but also with teachers/parents and the environment;
- early integration – incorporating emotional learning into daily routines (play, reading etc.);
- reliance on an emotional vocabulary and visual supports;
- teaching skills: recognition, expression, regulation, conflict resolution, and empathy;
- acknowledging the child's feelings, naming them, and helping them choose regulation strategies.

Conclusions. To summarize, it has been established that in foreign psychological and pedagogical literature, the term “emotional perception” is used less frequently than categories such as “emotion perception” or “emotion recognition”, “emotional awareness”, and “emotional understanding”. However, in research on emotional intelligence, cognitive psychology, and neuropsychology, the concept under study is identified as a fundamental component of the emotional sphere.

The study demonstrates that theoretical frameworks such as emotional intelligence theory, attachment theory, and sociocultural approaches have offered significant explanatory models for understanding the mechanisms of a child's emotional perception of the world. The conducted analysis of sources indicates that the development of emotional perception in preschoolers is effectively provided if a systematic approach is taken: the involvement of teachers, family, and the creation of a supportive



environment. The most successful psychological and educational practices are built on respect for children's feelings, recognizing their significance, and teaching constructive ways to interact with the emotional world.

Thus, preschoolers' emotional understanding of the world can be purposefully developed through structured programs and everyday teaching practices. The most sustainable results are achieved when interventions involve both children and adults (teachers and parents), are integrated into daily routines, and are adapted to the cultural context. Ukrainian preschools can benefit from adapting such structured programs (RULER, PATHS, emotion coaching), combining them with local traditions and resources. The experience of implementing these programs can be the scope for further research.

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