

An Emotional Awareness Program for Children in Middle  
Childhood, for Utilization in the Educational System

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **An emotional awareness program for children in middle childhood, for utilization in the educational system**

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This study's contribution to knowledge is the contextualizing of emotional awareness as a prerequisite for becoming emotionally intelligent, and developing a program to educate emotional awareness, as a developmental ability, within the educational system.

Emotional intelligence is a familiar and widely recognized term, but is in fundamental nature more of a broad and overreaching outcome, rather than an ability. This research focused on children in the middle childhood developmental phase and how emotional awareness can be taught to them. An Emotional Awareness Program (EA Program) was developed and implemented within the classroom context and its effectiveness was evaluated to determine whether the EA Program did have an influence on emotional vocabulary, emotional expression and the general level of emotional awareness displayed by the learners.

Being emotionally aware, benefits children on different levels of their functioning. Various authors, as cited in this study, conclude that relationships, self-esteem, academic performance, independent functioning and self expression all benefit from the development of emotional awareness. Entering the school setting is often the child's first move into relationships with peers and adults other than family members. Learners spend most of their waking lives, during their middle childhood, in school. Many aspects necessary for emotional education may be found within the school

environment. These consist of peer relationships, empathy for others, problem-solving, developing a regard for the feelings of others and coping with difficult situations or emotions.

A child suffering physical and emotional abuse, neglect, trauma or insufficient stimulation presents neurological deterioration in neurons (the “building blocks” of the brain). Diminished brain functioning may result in anger, emotional episodes and disruptive behaviour as methods of emotional expression in some learners.

Neurological damage, suffered in this manner, can be reversed via the intervention of a caring adult. This interaction stimulates healthy neurons, and causes them to migrate to the area that suffered damage, thus illustrating the immense role educators are required to play in the future development and restoration of neurological health of some learners.

The educational system is ideally positioned to deal with children from a holistic perspective by addressing not only their cognitive and physical needs, but also their emotional and subsequent social needs. Furthermore, the development of the emotional awareness of educators will equip them with the necessary insight into the emotional needs of learners. It is anticipated that emotional awareness will benefit learners in general and have a positive ripple effect on schools and communities as a whole.

The study found that the Gestalt approach is best suited for the research study, as it presupposes that the child is “a whole and complex being”; and considers, as a backdrop, the child’s development regarding awareness and the influence that this has on their progress. It was noted from the study that this viewpoint is not always the point of departure of the current school set-up.

This investigation was executed using a quantitative research approach, with a structured method of inquiry. This consisted of the formulation of a specific and constant hypothesis, a predetermined research process and a standardized questionnaire. The researcher wanted to measure the effectiveness of an EA program on specific variables such as the learners’ ability to:

- be in contact with their emotions;
- discriminate between different emotions;
- verbalize and take ownership of their emotions;

This study resorted within the description of applied research, as it was undertaken to acquire new knowledge and was primarily directed towards practical objectives. It focused on a practical problem; the need for an EA Program for children in middle childhood that was scientifically tested within the South African Education System. Within the context of applied research, intervention research was applicable to this study as it aimed to develop technology, useful to the educational profession.

The design and development sub-type of intervention research best encompassed the researcher's intent to design and develop technology, namely the EA Program, to implement the program (intervention) and to evaluate the effectiveness thereof for further implementation within the education system. A quasi-experimental design namely the comparison group pre-test – post-test design was utilized.

A standardized questionnaire entitled Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS-C), developed by Dr. Jane Bajgar and Dr. Richard Lane (2003), was used as the measuring instrument. This questionnaire was developed specifically so that its use of language, the length and content of the form would be child appropriate.

The study focused on children in the middle childhood developmental phase, which proved to be the phase where emotional awareness begins to play an important role. Children in this phase are particularly susceptible to new knowledge as they have already obtained the basic cognitive abilities (reading, writing and reasoning) necessary to comprehend the content of the EA program.

The following conclusions were derived from the execution of this research study:

*Emotional awareness* seemed to be a relatively unfamiliar term in comparison with the widely recognized and renowned term, *emotional intelligence*. This study positioned emotional awareness as a prerequisite for emotional intelligence; as it is a practical awareness of cognitively obtainable knowledge regarding the emotions of self and others. Emotional intelligence on the other hand is achieved through constructive and optimal emotional awareness abilities.

Based on the research findings, and as suggested earlier, it appears that the education system is particularly well positioned to address the emotional development of a large percentage of the school going population. It is assumed that emotional awareness can be cognitively educated and educators

are equipped with the necessary educational skills. The education system is thus further favourably equipped to educate emotional content due to the fact that cognitive development is their field of expertise.

The research findings indicated that the EA Program succeeded to a great extent in developing emotional vocabulary, higher level emotional responses and the accompanying ability of emotional expression within the experimental group. This measured increase was derived from a seven week exposure to the EA program, which may be indicative of the results that could be achieved with daily exposure to emotional learning, and a healthy emotional setting within the school environment.

Obtaining higher level emotional vocabulary is evidently accompanied by emotional expression as the appropriate vocabulary, which is necessary to express the emotional experience accurately. Emotional expression abilities were addressed in particular by the EA Program, and the empirical results suggest that the emotional vocabulary of respondents did expand.

A caring educator, well equipped with insight into emotional awareness, may in many instances prove to be a safety net for many learners. This may well serve as a catalyst for reprogramming the brain of the emotionally scarred learner to trust, and risk getting back in the circle of life again, a better alternative than having the learner only surviving by adopting ‘fight’ or ‘flight’ strategies.

Educators must become equipped with the knowledge to comprehend the possibly diminished brain development of the rebellious, aggressive, emotional or introverted learner. This will ensure that their response to such learners has emotional development at heart rather than further emotional harm. Educators should therefore be in touch with their own emotional awareness as well. Indeed, it may prove interesting to determine the value that would be added to the quality of education in South Africa through emotional awareness training to educators. The education system as a whole possesses a responsibility and accountability regarding the educational wellbeing of their learners, as emotional health pre-determines the learners’ ability to thrive.

This study made a valuable contribution to the field of both social work and education in their collective aim to develop and empower children. It is recommended that the common grounds where these two professions may meet should be further explored to determine where such a partnership can add further value to the South African educational setting. Providing an emotionally safe and secure

classroom atmosphere requires further exploration, as it is an additional factor relating to the ability of learners to excel in class.

Existing literature suggests that peer relationships and self-esteem will also benefit from emotional awareness, but the development of these two variables was not tested in this study, and may be a topic for further research.

It would be significant to repeat this study on a national level to determine the current emotional level of primary school learners. Comparative studies to determine the differences in emotional awareness of learners in urban and rural areas, or within different ethnic backgrounds may also be of value. This will assist in determining the South African situation regarding emotional awareness and to develop the means to enhance it within the South African education system. This study demonstrated that emotional awareness is an easily comprehensible term which can be easily educated but presents vast benefits.

### **Key concepts**

- Emotional awareness;
- Emotional intelligence;
- Emotions;
- Middle childhood;
- Gestalt;
- Emotional expression
- Emotional vocabulary
- Educating system;
- Educator;
- Emotional Awareness Program.

# OPSOMMING

## **’n Emosionele bewussyn program vir kinders in die middel kinderjare ontwikkelingsfase, vir benutting in die onderwys sisteem**

Deur

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Hierdie studie se belangrikste kennisbydrae is die kontekstualisering van emosionele bewussyn as ’n voorvereiste om emosionele intelligensie te kan bereik. Hieruit het die ontwikkeling van ’n program om emosionele bewussyn as ’n ontwikkelingstaak binne die onderwys sisteem te onderrig, voortgevloei.

Emosionele intelligensie is ’n bekende (persepsie) en erkende term, maar is fundamenteel ’n uitkoms eerder as ’n vermoë. Hierdie navorsingstudie het gefokus op kinders in die middel kinderjare ontwikkelingsfase en hoe hulle in emosionele bewussyn onderrig kan word. ’n Emosionele Bewussyn Program (EB Program) was ontwikkel en in die klaskamerkonteks geïmplimenteer. Die effektiwiteit van die EB Program was ge-evalueer om te bepaal of dit daarin geslaag het om die emosionele woordeskat, emosionele uitdrukking en algemene vlak van emosionele bewussyn van leerders te verhoog.

Emosionele bewussyn bevoordeel leerders op verskillende vlakke van funksionering. Verskillende outeurs, soos aangehaal in hierdie studie, kom tot die slotsom dat aspekte soos verhoudings, selfbeeld, akademiese prestasie, onafhanklikheid en selfbeskikking beïnvloed word deur verhoogde emosionele bewussyn.



Toetreding tot die skoolsisteem is dikwels leerders se eerste formele kennismaking met portuurgroepverhoudings en verhoudings met volwassenes buite hulle familiekring. Leerders spandeer die grootste deel van hulle lewe, in die middel kinderjare ontwikkelingsfase, in die skool. Verskeie aspekte noodsaaklik vir emosionele onderrig is algemeen teenwoordig in die onderrigsisteem en skool omgewing. Dit sluit in: verhoudings, empatie, probleemoplossing, besorgdheid oor die gevoelens van ander en om moeilike situasies te hanteer. Hierin is 'n gesonde vlak van neurologiese ontwikkeling dus ook van belang.

'n Kind wat gebuk gaan onder fisieke en emosionele mishandeling, verwaarlosing, trauma of 'n gebrek aan stimulasie presenteer neurologiese afbreking van neurone (boustene van die brein) wat beperking in breinfunksionering tot gevolg het. Beperkte funksionering van hierdie aard presenteer meestal in aggressie, emosionele uitreagering en destruktiewe gedrag as metodes van emosionele uitdrukking by sommige leerders.

Neurologiese skade, wat op hierdie wyse opgedoen is, hoef egter nie permanent te wees nie en kan omgekeer word deur die betrokkenheid van 'n liefdevolle en versorgende volwassene. Die kind se interaksie, geborgenheid en veiligheid binne die verhouding met so 'n volwassene stimuleer gesonde neurone en bring mee dat hulle migreer na die areas waar skade opgedoen is. Hierin word die belangrike rol wat onderwysers kan speel in die toekomstige ontwikkeling en herstel van die neurologiese gesondheid van hulle leerders duidelik illustreer.

Die onderwysstelsel is ideaal geposisioneer om leerders vanuit 'n holistiese perspektief op te voed deur nie alleen kognitiewe en fisieke ontwikkeling nie maar ook emosionele en gepaardgaande sosiale behoeftes aan te spreek. Daar word antisipeer dat emosionele bewussyn by leerders ook 'n rimpeleffek vir die hele skool en gemeenskap as geheel sou kon inhou. Die ontwikkeling van emosionele bewussyn van onderwysers is 'n verdere belangrike aspek omdat dit hulle sal bemagtig met die nodige insig in hulle eie emosionele ervarings asook met begrip vir die emosionele behoeftes van leerders.

Die Gestalt benadering was identifiseer as die mees toepaslike teoretiese onderbou vir hierdie studie aangesien dit veronderstel dat die kind 'n saamgestelde en komplekse wese is. Dit maak ook daarvoor voorsiening om op die agtergrond die kind se ontwikkeling ten opsigte van bewussyn en die invloed daarvan in die kind se ontwikkeling en prestasie, in gedagte te hou.

Daar was deur hierdie studie identifiseer dat hierdie uitgangspunt nie noodwendig binne die huidige Suid Afrikaanse skoolsisteem toegepas word nie, `n aspek wat deur hierdie studie aangespreek word.

Hierdie ondersoek was uitgevoer vanuit `n kwantitatiewe navorsingsbenadering, met `n gestruktureerde metode van navraag. Dit het bestaan uit die formulering van spesifieke hipoteses, `n vooraf bepaalde navorsingsproses en `n gestandaardiseerde vraelys. Die navorser se doel was om die effektiwiteit van `n EB Program op spesifieke veranderlikes te meet naamlik, leerders se vermoë om:

- in kontak met hulle emosies te kom;
- tussen verskillende emosies te kan diskrimineer;
- eienaarskap van hulle emosies te neem en dit te kan verbaliseer;

Hierdie studie het resorteer binne die beskrywing van toegepaste navorsing, aangesien dit onderneem was om nuwe kennis te ontgin en primêr gefokus was op praktiese doelwitte. Dit het verder gefokus op `n praktiese probleem; die behoefte aan `n EB Program vir kinders in die middelkinderjare (ontwikkelingsstadium) wat wetenskaplik binne die Suid Afrikaanse onderwysstelsel getoets is. Binne die konteks van toegepaste navorsing was intervensie- navorsing toepaslik in die studie as gevolg van die feit dat dit die ontwikkeling van tegnologie vir beide maatskaplike werk en die onderwys ten doel gehad het.

Die ontwerp en ontwikkeling sub-tipe van intervensienavorsing het hierdie studie ten beste omlin aangesien die navorser tegnologie ontwerp en ontwikkel het, naamlik die ontwerp van die EB Program, die implimentering van die EB Program (intervensie) en die evaluering van die effektiwiteit daarvan vir toekomstige implementering binne die onderwysstelsel. `n Kwasi-eksperimentele ontwerp, naamlik die vergelykende groep voortoets – natoets ontwerp was benut.

`n Gestandaardiseerde vraelys getitel “Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS-C)”, ontwikkel deur Dr. Jane Bajgar and Dr. Richard Lane (2003), was as meetinstrument aangewend. Hierdie vraelys is spesifiek ontwikkel sodat die taal waaruit dit bestaan, die lengte van die inhoud en vorm waarin dit aangebied word toepaslik vir die ontwikkelingsvlak en vermoëns van kinders sal wees.

Hierdie studie het gefokus op kinders in die middelkinderjare ontwikkelingsfase, `n fase waar emosionele bewussyn `n beduidende rol begin speel. Kinders in hierdie fase is veral vatbaar vir nuwe

inligting aangesien hulle reeds die basiese kognitiewe vermoëns (lees, skryf en redenering) bemeester het. Hierdie vaardighede was noodsaaklik om die inhoud van die EB Program en vraelys te begryp.

Die volgende gevolgtrekkings kon vanuit die uitvoering van hierdie studie gemaak word:

*Emosionele bewussyn* blyk `n relatief onbekende begrip in vergelyking met die algemeen bekende en erkende term *emosionele intelligensie*, te wees. Hierdie studie het emosionele bewussyn posisioneer as `n voorvereiste vir die bereiking van emosionele intelligensie; daar dit `n praktiese bewussyn of kognitief bereikbare kennis rakende eie emosies en die emosies van ander is. Emosionele intelligensie aan die ander kant is `n uitkoms wat bereik word wanneer konstruktiewe en optimale kennis en vaardighede op die gebied van emosionele bewussyn bekom is.

Gebasseer op die navorsingsbevindinge blyk dit dat die onderwyssisteem veral goed geposisioneer is om die emosionele ontwikkeling van `n hoë persentasie van die skoolgaande populasie aan te spreek. Die mening bestaan dat emosionele bewussyn kognitief onderrig kan word en onderwysers is toegerus met die onderrigvaardighede wat hiervoor benodig word. Die onderwyssisteem is dus in `n gunstige posisie om emosionele inhoud te onderrig gesien in die lig daarvan dat kognitiewe ontwikkeling die onderwys se spesialiteitsveld is.

Die navorsingsbevindinge dui aan dat die EB Program in `n groot mate daarin geslaag het om emosionele woordeskat by die respondente te ontwikkel asook hoër vlak emosionele response en die gepaardgaande vermoë tot emosionele uitdrukking by die eksperimentele groep te ontwikkel. Die toename wat gemeet is, was verkry van `n sewe weke blootstelling aan die EB Program, wat aanduidend kan wees van die resultate wat verkry behoort te word deur daaglikse blootstelling aan emosionele onderrig en `n gesonde emosionele atmosfeer binne die skoolomgewing.

Verkryging van hoër vlak emosionele woordeskat gaan gepaard met emosionele uitdrukking aangesien toepaslike woordeskat benodig word om `n emosionele ervaring akkuraat te kan beskryf. Emosionele uitdrukking as `n vaardigheid was in besonder deur die EB Program aangespreek en die empiriese resultate dui daarop dat die emosionele woordeskat van respondente wel verhoog het.

`n Toegewyde onderwyser, toegerus met insig in emosionele bewussyn sou in menige opsigte `n vangnet kon wees vir leerders met emosionele skade. Dit sou kan dien as katalisator vir herprogrammering van die brein van `n emosioneel beskadigde leerder om weer te vertrou en die waagmoed te ontwikkel om weer met selfvertroue tot die lewe toe te tree. Dit is vanselfsprekend `n

beter alternatief vir 'n leerder wie andersins slegs sou oorleef deur middel van 'n veg-of-vlug strategie.

Hierdie studie maak verder 'n waardevolle bydrae tot die veld van beide maatskaplike werk en die onderwys in hulle gesamentlike doel om kinders te beskerm en te bemagtig. Daar word aanbeveel dat die gemeenskaplike gronde waar hierdie twee professies kan ontmoet verder ge-eksplorieer word ten einde te bepaal op watter wyse so 'n vennootskap verdere waarde tot die Suid Afrikaanse onderrigstelsel kan toevoeg. 'n Veilige emosionele atmosfeer binne die klaskamer behoort ook verder ge-eksplorieer te word aangesien dit 'n addisionele faktor is wat verband hou met leerders se vermoë om te presteer. Onderwysers behoort toegerus te word met kennis en begrip van die moontlikheid van beperkte breinontwikkeling by die rebelse, aggressiewe, oor-emosionele of introvert leerder. Dit sal verseker dat hulle hantering van sulke leerders emosionele ontwikkeling ten doel het eerder as verdere emosionele skade. Onderwysers behoort om hierdie rede ook optimaal in voeling te kom met hulle eie emosionele bewussyn. Dit sou gevolglik van belang wees om te bepaal hoeveel waarde tot die kwaliteit van onderrig in Suid Afrika toegevoeg kan word deur onderrig ten opsigte van emosionele bewussyn, aan onderwysers. Hierdie belangrike taak rus grotendeels op die skouers van die onderwysstelsel wat die verantwoordelikheid vir die emosionele gesondheid van leerders kan neem wat dan verder die vermoë om op verskillende vlakke te presteer, sal bevorder.

Bestaande literatuur dui aan dat portuurverhoudings en selfbeeld ook voordelig beïnvloed sal word deur emosionele bewussyn, maar die ontwikkeling van hierdie twee veranderlikes was nie in hierdie studie getoets nie en kan as die onderwerp vir verdere navorsing benut word.

In die lig van die gevolgtrekkings van hierdie studie sal dit waarde inhou om die studie op nasionale vlak te herhaal ten einde die huidige vlak van emosionele bewussyn van laerskool- leerders te bepaal. Vergelykende studies om die verskil te bepaal in emosionele bewussyn van leerders in stedelike en landelike gebiede of tussen leerders van verskillende etniese agtergronde, sal ook waardevolle kennis inwin. 'n Studie van hierdie aard sou ook bydra tot die bepaling van die Suid Afrikaanse situasie ten opsigte van emosionele bewussyn en om metodes te ontwikkel om emosionele bewussyn op breë vlak binne die Suid Afrikaanse onderrigstelsel te ontwikkel.

Hierdie navorsingstudie het demonstreeer dat emosionele bewussyn `n eenvoudig verstaanbare term is en `n konsep wat eenvoudig onderrig kan word maar wat verrykende voordele vir ontwikkeling kan inhou.

### **Sleutel begrippe**

- Emosionele bewussyn;
- Emosionele intelligensie;
- Emosie;
- Middelkinderjare;
- Gestalt;
- Emosionele uitdrukking;
- Emosionele woordeskat;
- Onderwysstelsel;
- Onderwyser;
- Emosionele Bewussyn Program.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	ii
Opsomming	vii

## CHAPTER 1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	PROBLEM FORMULATION	6
1.3	GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY	10
1.3.1	Goal	10
1.3.2	Objectives	10
1.4	HYPOTHESIS	11
1.5	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	12
1.6	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	16
1.7	DEFINITION OF MAIN CONCEPTS	17
1.7.1	Awareness	17
1.7.2	Emotions	17
1.7.3	Emotional awareness	18
1.7.4	The Middle Childhood Developmental Phase	18
1.7.5	Program	19
1.8	COMPOSITION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT	20
1.9	SUMMARY	21

## CHAPTER 2

# GESTALT APPROACH AS THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

2.1	INTRODUCTION	22
2.2	RATIONALE FOR THE GESTALT APPROACH AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY	24
2.3	CONCEPTS OF THE GESTALT APPROACH	26
2.3.1	Introduction	26
2.3.2	Gestalt	27
2.3.3	Figure and Ground	28
2.3.4	Awareness	29
2.3.5	Self-regulation / Homeostasis	30
2.3.6	Contact	30
2.3.7	Topdog/Underdog	34
2.3.8	Unfinished Business	35
2.3.9	Present Centeredness	35
2.4	FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AS POINT OF DEPARTURE OF THE GESTALT APPROACH	36
2.4.1	Introduction	36
2.4.2	Gestalt as Phenomenological-Existential Approach	36
2.4.3	Awareness	38
2.4.4	Structure of the Personality	39
2.5	GOALS OF THE GESTALT APPROACH	40
2.6	SUMMARY	41

## CHAPTER 3

### MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AS DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE

3.1	INTRODUCTION	43
3.2	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES REGARDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT	44
3.3	MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AS DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE	48
3.4	AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD	50
3.4.1	Physical Development	51
3.4.2	Cognitive Development	52
3.4.3	Emotional Development	54
3.4.4	Social Development	55
3.5	DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD	58
3.5.1	Self-Image	58
3.5.2	Relationships	60
3.5.3	Gender Role Identification	61
3.5.4	Cognitive and Language Development	62
3.5.5	Moral Judgment and Behaviour	63
3.5.6	Emotional Development	64
3.6	SUMMARY	67



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **NEUROLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO LEARN**

4.1	INTRODUCTION	69
4.2	THE BRAIN: CONTROL SYSTEM OF THE HUMAN BODY AND MIND	70
4.2.1	Development of the Brain	71
4.2.2	Brain Structure	73
4.2.3	Brain Functioning and its Developmental Effect on the Child's Future	76
4.3	EMOTIONAL EDUCATION VS. BRAIN FUNCTIONING	79
4.3.1	Brain- friendly Education	79
4.3.2	Left or Right Brain Dominance	80
4.4	SUMMARY	84

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **EMOTIONAL AWARENESS**

5.1	INTRODUCTION	85
5.2	EMOTION IN GENERAL	87
5.2.1	Conceptualization of the Concept Emotion	88
5.2.2	The Concept Emotion from Different Perspectives	89
5.2.2.1	Biological Perspective	89
5.2.2.2	Sociological Perspective	90
5.2.2.3	Psychological Perspective	90
5.2.2.4	Cognitive Perspective	91
5.2.3	Theories on Emotions	92
5.2.3.1	Early Theories of Emotion	93
5.2.3.2	Current Theory of Emotion	98

5.3	ASPECTS RELATED TO EMOTIONS IN CHILDREN	100
5.3.1	The Importance of Emotional Development for Children	101
5.3.2	Emotional Awareness and Emotional Intelligence During Middle Childhood	103
5.3.2.1	Emotional Awareness	104
5.3.2.2	Emotional Intelligence	105
5.3.3	Levels of Emotional Awareness	108
5.3.4	Emotional Awareness as a Cognitive Ability	111
5.4	SUMMARY	112

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

6.1	INTRODUCTION	114
6.2	RATIONALE FOR INCORPORATING EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM	118
6.3	AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT THAT WOULD ENHANCE THE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD	124
6.3.1	Conditions for Learning	125
6.3.2	Role of the Educator	129
6.3.3	Effective Learning	131
6.4	EFFECTIVE SCHOOL SETTING	133
6.5	SUMMARY	134

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **EMOTIONAL AWARENESS PROGRAM**

7.1	INTRODUCTION	136
7.2	GESTALT PLAY THERAPY	139
7.3	EMOTIONAL AWARENESS PROGRAM	140
7.3.1	Module 1: Build and Strengthen Relationship with Learners	142
7.3.2	Module 2: Knowledge of Different Emotions	144
7.3.3	Module 3: Emotional Language	146
7.3.4	Module 4: Empathy	148
7.3.5	Module 5: Emotional Regulation	151
7.3.6	Module 6: Problem Solving and Decision Making	156
7.3.7	Module 7: Summarizing and Termination	160
7.4	SUMMARY	162

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

8.1	INTRODUCTION	164
8.1.1	Goal	165
8.1.2	Objectives	165
8.1.3	Hypotheses	166
8.2	RESEARCH APPROACH	166
8.3	TYPE OF RESEARCH	168
8.4	RESEARCH DESIGN	172
8.5	POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHODS	173
8.5.1	Population	173
8.5.2	Sample	173

8.5.3	Sampling Method	174
8.6	DATA-COLLECTION METHOD	175
8.6.1	Measuring Instrument	175
8.6.2	Validity and Reliability of the Measuring Instrument	177
8.6.3	Pilot Study	178
8.6.4	Administration of the Measuring Instrument	179
8.7	DATA ANALYSIS	180
8.8	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	180
8.9	SUMMARY	186

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

9.1	INTRODUCTION	187
9.2	BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS	188
9.2.1	Age and developmental Phase of Respondents	188
9.2.2	Language of Respondents	188
9.2.3	Gender of Respondents	189
9.3	EMPIRICAL FINDINGS	190
9.3.1	Development of Emotional Vocabulary	191
9.3.1.1	Frequency of Responses According to LEAS-C Levels of Emotional Value	192
9.3.1.2	Comparison between level four and level five responses	197
9.3.1.3	Synopsis of response frequency	198
9.3.1.4	Strong and weak emotion words	200
9.3.2	Emotional Awareness Levels	205
9.3.3	Comparison of Emotional Awareness between Male and Female Respondents	208
9.4	DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	212
9.5	SUMMARY	219

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1	INTRODUCTION	220
10.2	CONCLUSIONS	222
10.3	RECOMMENDATIONS	230
10.4	ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOAL AND OBJECTIVES	235
10.5	CONCLUDING REMARKS	236
	REFERENCES	239

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1:	Summary of Different Theories of Child Development	45
Table 4.1:	Difference Between Left and Right Brain Learners	81
Table 5.1:	The Four-Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence	106
Table 5.2:	Levels of Emotional Awareness	110
Table 7.1:	Emotional Awareness Program	142
Table 9.1:	Gender Composition of Respondents	187

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1:	Structure of personality	40
Figure 4.1:	Brain cells or neurons	72
Figure 4.2:	Neurotransmitter of the synapse	73
Figure 4.3:	Condensed version of brain function	74
Figure 4.4:	The Amygdala and hippocampus	75
Figure 4.4:	Right and left brain function	81
Figure 4.5:	The limbic system in correlation with the right and left hemisphere's of the brain	82
Figure 4.6:	Graphic illustration of the difference in hemisphere functioning	83
Figure 5.1:	Comparison between the James Lange and Cannon-Bard theories of emotion	96
Figure 5.2:	Plutchik's wheel of emotion	99
Figure 6.1:	Maslow's hierarchy of needs	126
Figure 9.1:	Gender composition of respondents	190
Figure 9.2:	Frequency of level 2 responses	193
Figure 9.3:	Frequency of level 3 responses	194
Figure 9.4:	Frequency of level 4 responses	195
Figure 9.5:	Frequency of level 5 responses	191

Figure 9.6:	Comparison of level 4 and 5 responses	196
Figure 9.7:	Synopsis of response frequency	199
Figure 9.8:	Weak emotion words used by the comparison group	201
Figure 9.9:	Weak emotion words used by the experimental group	202
Figure 9.10:	Strong emotion words used by the comparison group	203
Figure 9.11:	Strong emotion words used by the experimental group	204
Figure 9.12:	Emotional awareness level of the comparison group	205
Figure 9.13:	Emotional awareness level of the experimental group	206
Figure 9.14:	Comparison of the increase in emotional awareness between the comparison and the experimental group as measured in the post-test	207
Figure 9.15:	Comparison of the results measured from the responses obtained by the different genders in the comparison group	209
Figure 9.16:	Comparison of the results measured from the responses obtained by the different genders in the experimental group	210
Figure 9.17:	Improvement in the emotional development between boys and girls	211

## **LIST OF APPENDIX**

Appendix A:	Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS-C)
Appendix B:	Approval for translation of the LEAS-C
Appendix C:	Approval for research within selected school, from the Department of Education in Limpopo
Appendix D:	Approval for research, from the selected school
Appendix E:	Written consent from parents
Appendix F:	Written consent from educator involved
Appendix G:	Assent from the learners
Appendix H:	Approval of the study, from the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria