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## The development of emotional intelligence through visual plastic strategies in children from 4 to 6 years old

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is focused on the development of emotional intelligence by visual plastic strategies in children from 4 to 6 years old, the same one that is directed to the line of research linked to the National Development Plan "Creation Plan of Opportunities 2021-2025", in particular, it is related to objective 7, which seeks to strengthen the capacities of citizenship, and promote an innovative, inclusive, and quality education at all levels. Its purpose is to enhance the teaching-learning process in the early years of schooling, laying solid foundations for the educational development of boys and girls. These strategies comprise artistic techniques, and approaches that foster children's creativity and imagination, promoting their personal expression, visual perception, and emotional exploration; in turn, emotional intelligence in infants is defined as the ability to identify, understand, and regulate both their own emotions and those of others, which facilitates problem-solving. This research was developed within a methodological design based on a non-experimental approach, aligned with the

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pragmatic paradigm and with a mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative). A bibliographic-documentary and field research were used, with a descriptive scope, which allowed us to approach the topic of study in depth and, at the same time, to characterize the population and sample analyzed. Observation of the population sample was carried out with the purpose of gathering information, which was later analyzed and interpreted to understand the problem. The results revealed that educators, due to lack of knowledge, tend to limit the implementation of artistic activities, which significantly reduces their use in the classroom. In conclusion, plastic and visual strategies have a positive impact on the development of emotional intelligence in children since they promote self-awareness and contribute to their integral development. In addition, they strengthen interpersonal relationships with their peers and their environment, providing a solid foundation for their personal growth and daily life.

*Keywords:* emotional intelligence, visual plastic strategies, intrapersonal relationships, teaching-learning, art

## Resumen

El propósito de esta investigación está enfocado en el desarrollo de la inteligencia emocional mediante estrategias visoplásticas en niños y niñas de 4 a 6 años, la misma que se encamina a la línea de investigación vinculada al Plan Nacional de Desarrollo “Plan de Creación de Oportunidades 2021-2025”, en particular, se relaciona con el objetivo 7, que busca fortalecer las capacidades de la ciudadanía, y promover una educación innovadora, inclusiva y de calidad en todos los niveles. Su propósito es potenciar el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje en los primeros años de escolaridad, sentando bases sólidas para el desarrollo educativo de niños y niñas. Estas estrategias comprenden técnicas artísticas, y enfoques que fomentan la creatividad e imaginación de los niños y niñas, promoviendo su expresión personal, percepción visual y exploración emocional; a su vez, la inteligencia emocional en infantes se define como la capacidad de identificar, comprender y regular tanto las emociones propias como las de los demás, lo que facilita la solución de problemas. Esta investigación se desarrolló dentro de un diseño metodológico basado en un enfoque no experimental, alineado al paradigma pragmático y con una metodología mixta (cualitativa y cuantitativa). Se utilizó una investigación bibliográfica-documental y de campo, con un alcance descriptivo, que permitió abordar a profundidad el tema de estudio y, al mismo tiempo, caracterizar la población y muestra analizada. Se realizó la observación de la muestra poblacional con el propósito de recabar información, que posteriormente fue analizada e interpretada para comprender la problemática. Los resultados revelaron que los educadores, por falta de conocimientos, tienden a limitar la implementación de actividades artísticas, lo que reduce significativamente su uso en el aula. En conclusión, las estrategias plásticas y visuales inciden positivamente en el desarrollo de la inteligencia emocional en los niños ya que promueven el autoconocimiento y contribuyen a su desarrollo integral. Además, fortalecen las relaciones interpersonales con sus iguales y su entorno, brindando una base sólida para su crecimiento personal y vida cotidiana.

*Palabras clave:* inteligencia emocional, estrategias plásticas visuales, relaciones intrapersonales, enseñanza-aprendizaje, arte

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This research explores the development of emotional intelligence with the use of visual plastic strategies in children from 4 to 6 years old. The main objective was to analyze how these strategies can contribute as a means to express, explore, and understand emotions through art, becoming an essential tool for children's emotional and social growth.

Emotional intelligence focuses on emotions as psychophysiological reactions experienced by the organism before certain stimuli or situations. These responses involve transformations at physiological, cognitive, and behavioral levels, allowing adaptation and reaction to the challenges of the environment. In this sense, by understanding the nature of emotions in human beings, emotional intelligence in children is defined as the ability to identify, interpret, and regulate both their own emotions and those of others, using this knowledge for their development and well-being.

Artistic strategies play a fundamental role in the teaching-learning process, since they not only stimulate creativity and personal expression but also strengthen cognitive, motor, and socioemotional skills in children. Through art, infants can explore their environment, communicate ideas and emotions, and develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Art is a dynamic and integrative activity that allows children to learn in a playful and meaningful way, promoting their autonomy and self-esteem. It also promotes concentration, patience, and perseverance, essential skills for their academic and personal growth.

Drawing, painting, and construction are essential tools that stimulate creativity, strengthen fine and gross motor coordination, and encourage teamwork. In addition, the manipulation of different materials and textures improves sensory perception and observation skills, favoring deeper and more meaningful learning.

In this context, the integration of artistic strategies in early childhood education not only boosts children's integral development but also strengthens their communication skills and emotional intelligence, providing them with valuable resources to face the challenges of their daily lives.

Art, as a dynamic and unifying activity, plays an essential role in the teaching-learning process and in the integral formation of infants. Through drawing, painting or construction, children combine diverse elements of their experience to give them new meaning. By selecting, interpreting and transforming these elements, they express more than simple visual creations: they reflect their way of thinking, feeling and perceiving the world around them.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A mixed approach was adopted that combined quantitative and qualitative elements to obtain an integral vision of the object of study; a bibliographic-documentary approach was used, based on the review and analysis of theoretical sources and previous antecedents, as well as a field approach, which allowed direct data collection in the study environment. In addition, an exploratory-descriptive level was defined, adequate to identify and characterize the variables according to the objectives set.

To ensure the rigor of the study, the process of variables operationalization was carefully detailed, establishing indicators and dimensions that facilitated their measurement and analysis; the data collection techniques and instruments used were specified, such as surveys, interviews or content analysis, as appropriate. Finally, the procedures used for the analysis and interpretation of the results were described, ensuring an adequate systematization that would make it possible to draw well-founded and pertinent conclusions.

Through the use of various sources of information, a solid base of previous knowledge on the subject is established, with the objective of ensuring the quality, effectiveness and relevance of educational practices and interventions when observing the integral development of children in the Early Education Center.

Regarding the research population, it was aimed at a sample composed of 114 participants, including 2 educational authorities, 12 teachers and 100 children between the ages of 4 and 6 years old.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Over time, the concept of intelligence has undergone an evolution, being approached from different perspectives; in the twentieth century, a growing interest in its study began to emerge, which allowed initial advances that laid the foundations for subsequent developments in this field.

Thus, Mayer and Salovey, (1997) define it as "Emotional intelligence relates the ability to accurately perceive, value and express emotions, it also relates the ability to access and generate feelings when they facilitate thinking, also the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge and the ability to regulate emotions that promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 10). Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, understand, manage, and harness both one's own emotions and those of others for the purpose of fostering healthy interpersonal relationships.

Several previous studies have contributed to a greater understanding of emotions and their impact on different domains, from thinking and behavior to personal interactions and the relationship with oneself.

Mayer, J. D. and Salovey, R (1997). "What is Emotional Intelligence?" in P. Salovey and D. J. Sluyter: Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence. New York: BasicBooks.

Goleman D. The brain and emotional intelligence. Barcelona: Ediciones B, S.A.; 2012.

Goleman D. Emotional intelligence. Barcelona: Kairos; 1996.

While Goleman D. (1996), defines emotional intelligence as "It is the ability to recognize our own feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves, to successfully manage emotions, both in ourselves and in our human relationships".

Daniel Goleman is one of the main researchers and disseminators of emotional intelligence, his work was key to popularize this concept, highlighting its importance in personal, academic and professional development. He argues that success in life does not depend solely on IQ, but also on the ability to manage emotions and understand those of others.

According to Goleman, emotional intelligence is composed of five fundamental skills:

**Self-awareness:** Ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions.

**Self-regulation:** Ability to manage impulses and emotions appropriately.

**Motivation:** Use of emotions to achieve goals and maintain perseverance.

**Empathy:** Ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others.

**Social skills:** Ability to manage interpersonal relationships effectively.

Goleman argues that these skills are essential for effective cognitive intelligence, as they enable better performance in decision making, problem solving and social interaction. His research has had a significant impact in the educational and organizational field, promoting the incorporation of emotional development in different environments, from early childhood education to business leadership (Daniel Goleman), is one of the most important researchers who popularized the term as such, which emphasizes that such intelligence is important to carry out an effective cognitive intelligence.

### **The management of emotional intelligence in childhood**

Emotional intelligence is a broad concept that has evolved along with human development and, at present, its strengthening from childhood is fundamental, its impact goes beyond individual well-being, because it facilitates personal success, improves interpersonal relationships and favors adaptation to different environments, thus promoting collective balance and harmony.

It is of utmost importance to encourage the management of emotional intelligence in children, because it helps them to develop the following:

Emotional self-awareness, this implies that children identify and understand their emotions, allowing them to recognize how they feel in different situations and the reasons behind those emotions. This helps them to express them appropriately, strengthening their confidence and ability to act positively.

**Self-control:** refers to the development of skills to regulate emotions, managing in a healthy way feeling such as anger and frustration that may occur in children, this promotes more appropriate and constructive responses to different stimuli.

**Empathy:** is essential for children to learn to put themselves in the place of others, understanding their emotions and reactions, facilitating the ability to create healthier and more harmonious relationships in the environments in which they develop. Empathy favors the formation of healthy relationships by improving communication and the ability to collaborate in different social environments, develops the ability to manage emotions in conflict situations, reduces aggression and promotes peaceful problem solving.

**Social skills:** include assertive communication, conflict resolution and cooperation, skills that are essential for establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships throughout life.

**Conscious decision making:** emotional intelligence allows to evaluate situations objectively, considering both emotional and rational aspects, strengthens resilience, facilitating the overcoming of obstacles and adaptation to adverse circumstances, this implies that children consider both their own emotions and those of others before making important decisions, favoring balanced and responsible choices.

**Motivation:** key in child development, well-cultivated emotional intelligence fosters intrinsic motivation, driving children to set personal goals and persevere to achieve them.

**Stress management:** teaches children to cope with pressure and life challenges with resilience, employing effective strategies to deal with difficult situations.

### **Importance of emotional intelligence in children**

In academia, emotional management plays a crucial role in children's performance and well-being; when students are able to regulate their emotions, they can concentrate better on schoolwork, avoiding distractions caused by anxiety, stress or frustration, allowing them to stay focused on learning objectives and develop a greater capacity for sustained attention.

Emotional regulation favors problem solving, as children learn to handle challenges calmly and seek solutions reflectively rather than reacting impulsively. By developing this skill, students can approach complex academic situations with greater confidence and perseverance, which strengthens their analytical and critical thinking skills.

On the other hand, a positive attitude towards learning is strengthened when children are able to manage their emotions, self-confidence and intrinsic motivation increase, which drives them to take on new challenges with enthusiasm and resilience. Likewise, emotional intelligence contributes to improve the relationship with peers and teachers, favoring a more harmonious, collaborative and conducive to learning school environment.

Studies have shown that children with developed emotional skills are less likely to experience emotional blocks that affect their academic performance. Feeling emotionally secure, they are more open to exploring new ideas, creativity and active participation in the classroom, which enhances their overall development and long-term educational success.

Emotional intelligence equips children with essential tools to strengthen their self-awareness, enabling them to recognize and understand their emotions. This helps them cope more effectively with their experiences and develop a positive relationship with themselves.

Children with higher emotional intelligence tend to perform better academically, as they handle stress, pressure and interpersonal relationships better. It also contributes to bullying prevention; children who understand and regulate their emotions are less likely to act aggressively and more inclined to foster an inclusive school environment.

Emotional intelligence is closely linked to mental health, as healthy emotional expression from childhood prevents psychological problems and promotes lasting emotional well-being. It is not only a crucial skill in childhood; its benefits extend into adulthood; those who have developed it are more likely to maintain satisfying relationships, achieve professional success and enjoy a balanced life.

Finally, cultivating emotional intelligence in childhood not only has an impact at the individual level, but also contributes to building a more empathetic and compassionate society; understanding and respecting the emotions of others fosters healthier and more harmonious communities.

### **Impact of emotional intelligence development in childhood**

Childhood is a key phase in human growth, characterized by a rapid development and learning in the various aspects that society currently demands, so the development of emotional intelligence should also be encouraged, as it is already known, it refers to the ability to identify, understand and manage one's own emotions, as well as to interact effectively with others, these capabilities are essential for emotional and social well-being throughout life, and their development begins mainly in the first years of life.

During early childhood, children begin to experience and express a wide range of emotions, through interactions with their educators, peers, family and friends, they learn to identify basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear and anger, which enables them to communicate their needs and establish emotional bonds with others.

The first years of life are fundamental to lay the foundations for emotional intelligence and early relationships; parents and educators play a crucial role in this process, for which they must create a safe and affectionate environment at home and in the classroom that favors the creation of a solid emotional base, in which children can explore and learn to regulate their emotions.

Empathy is an essential component of emotional intelligence, it begins to develop as children interact with others, observe the emotions of those around them; with these interactions, children begin to understand and share the emotional experiences of others, which lays the foundation for building healthy social relationships and developing more complex skills over time.

Emotional self-regulation is also fundamental in the early development of emotional intelligence; children learn to manage challenging emotions, such as stress or frustration, to apply strategies to calm down and regain their emotional balance; for this reason, it is essential that educators, families and communities teach children effective techniques to cope with both positive and negative situations.

Play is another important tool in the development of emotional intelligence; it allows children to practice social skills, explore diverse emotions, and learn to resolve conflicts constructively; through play, children experience different emotional roles, which contributes to the development of their empathy and emotional understanding.

The family and cultural environment also has a significant impact on the formation of emotional intelligence; parenting practices, cultural norms, and life experiences uniquely influence each child's emotional development, contributing to a richer and more nuanced understanding of emotions.

Childhood is a crucial stage for the formation of emotional intelligence. emotional experiences and social interactions during the first years of life are essential to help children understand and manage their emotions, thus creating an emotionally healthy environment that favors their holistic development and provides them with the necessary tools to face emotional challenges in adulthood.

### **Visual plastic expression**

In Ecuador it has been proven that the first years of life are fundamental for the autonomous development of children, it is at this stage where they begin to express themselves through their imagination and creativity; through educational activities, they explore their first artistic manifestations, which allows them to develop independently. Plastic and visual techniques play a key role in this process, since they provide infants with diverse forms of expression and relationship with their environment; through fine movements, the use of hands and fingers, children interact both individually and in groups, strengthening their learning and cognitive development, in addition, the connection between art and emotional intelligence acts as a communication bridge, allowing them to express feelings and better understand their world.

According to the Ecuadorian Early Education Curriculum (2014), on artistic expression it expresses "It is intended to guide the development of the expression of their feelings, emotions and experiences through different artistic manifestations such as visual arts, music and theater." (p.32) Ecuador is a country in constant growth and evolution, which significantly influences the lives of people and, in particular, households with children. For this reason, in the city of Quito, the Ministry of Education has established a space that guarantees access to early education, a fundamental stage in the schooling of children.

Continuing with what is expressed by the Early Education Curriculum (2014), "In this area it is proposed to develop creativity through a process of awareness, appreciation and expression, based on their perception of reality and their particular taste, through the manipulation of different materials, resources and times for creation." (p.32) This access not only facilitates the beginning of their educational trajectory, but also gives them the opportunity to develop a different lifestyle through visual plastic strategies. These strategies strengthen the child's relationship with himself and his environment, since art acts as a bridge that stimulates the development of fine motor skills; likewise, it allows transcending the traditional education model, promoting socialization and ensuring a teaching

based on quality and warmth, essential aspects for their emotional formation and comprehensive development.

For Ana González (2016): “Visual plastic expression is a form of communication that allows children to enhance their creative and expressive abilities.” (p. 37). Through plastic and visual strategies, children can strengthen their socioemotional skills, which helps them to identify, understand and regulate both their own emotions and those of those around them.

Quoting again Ana González (2016), “Children's artistic expression through free experimentation provides them with the possibility of capturing their inner world, their feelings and sensations, through imagination, fantasy and creativity exploring, at the same time, new structures and resources.” (p. 37). Although there is a close relationship between visual plastic strategies and the development of emotional intelligence, there is currently a greater tendency to use playful strategies, such as games, for emotional management in children; however, the use of visual plastic activities, such as photography, painting, modeling, kirigami, sgraffito, performance, installations and videos, among others, is still limited, despite their potential to strengthen socioemotional education in childhood.

### **Strategies in early education**

According to the Methodological Guide for the Implementation of the Early Education Curriculum (2014) in which it states that “These strategies are a means and not the end, they have value only if they are effective in facilitating learning.” (p.22) Strategies in early education comprise specific techniques and approaches that teachers use to design and implement teaching-learning activities.

Also in Methodological Guide for the implementation of the Initial Education Curriculum (2014) it is found that, “Educators and teachers can select strategies, adapt them or invent new ones, always thinking about the children and the availability of space and materials to implement them.” (p. 22), these strategies are aimed at providing an enriching environment that favors effective learning and adapted to the individual needs of each child, considering their cognitive, emotional and social particularities at this key stage of their development.

Likewise, these strategies encourage children's active participation, which stimulates their intrinsic motivation and promotes meaningful and affective learning. Teaching effectiveness is enhanced when teachers take into account the age of the students to select appropriate methods and approaches in their planning, thus ensuring a more solid integral development.

The strategies not only favor the development of essential skills for lifelong learning, but also positively influence the socioemotional growth of children, in addition, they contribute to the strengthening of self-esteem, cooperation and empathy, providing a solid foundation for the formation of balanced and socially competent individuals, capable of interacting appropriately and effectively in the social and economic spheres in a democratic environment.

In the Early Education Curriculum, the methodology Work Game is one of the strategies that states “It is a flexible methodology that allows to better meet the diversity of the classroom and enhance the capabilities and interests of each child” (p.41). Through the corners or learning spaces, children participate in various activities in small groups through play, which allows them to learn autonomously and spontaneously. In these environments, they can freely choose the corner in which they wish to participate and, during the development of the game, they strengthen their skills, acquire new knowledge and explore their own interests. This approach gives them the opportunity to learn in a natural way that is tailored to their individual needs, incorporating artistic activities that stimulate their creativity and imagination in unique and innovative ways.

For the strategy to be effective, the curriculum recommends adopting various forms of interaction that favor meaningful learning and the integral development of children, these interactions should be adapted to the needs, interests and learning rhythms of each student, promoting an inclusive and enriching environment, it can be highlighted among the main forms of interaction suggested are:

The teacher acts as a mediator and facilitator of learning, guiding children in their exploration and construction of knowledge through questions, reflections and structured activities.

The teacher is the direct observer, either casually or systematically, with the purpose of following up on the fulfillment of the established objectives and the defined limits, as well as identifying aspects to improve in the children's development.

The teacher acts as a scenographer, planning and designing an adequate and safe environment that favors learning; he/she can also play the role of player, actively participating with the children to redirect behaviors, motivate them and encourage their involvement in the activity.

Through peer interaction, collaboration and teamwork are encouraged, allowing children to learn from each other through play, dialogue and joint problem solving.

Through interaction with the environment, children are encouraged to actively relate to their physical and social surroundings, promoting learning through experimentation, observation and exploration of materials and diverse resources.

Interaction with families allows for the participation of parents, legal representatives and caregivers, which is key in the educational process, since it reinforces and complements the learning acquired in the classroom, strengthening the link between the educational center and the home.

These forms of interaction allow children to develop cognitive, emotional and social skills in a comprehensive manner, ensuring that the teaching-learning process is based on a holistic approach.

For the strategy to be effective, the Early Education Curriculum has established four key moments that structure the teaching-learning process, allowing for more effective planning adapted to the needs of children. These moments ensure a comprehensive and meaningful educational experience.

The planning moment: at this stage, teachers and children meet to define the activities that will be carried out in the learning corners. The teacher guides and motivates the children to select and decide in which corner they want to participate, considering aspects such as what activity they will do, how they will carry it out, what materials they will use, with whom they will interact, where it will take place and what its purpose is. The main objective is to encourage the active participation of children, fostering their decision-making capacity and promoting their development within the educational environment.

The development moment: corresponds to the implementation of previously planned activities, in which children participate in their respective corners or rotate between them as necessary. During this phase, the teacher intervenes and interacts with different groups according to their needs, providing support and guidance.

The order moment: it focuses on the organization of the space, where the children, with the active assistance of the teacher, are in charge of collecting the materials and leaving the corners in suitable conditions for their next use.

Socialization moment: children and teachers meet again to reflect on the activities carried out, through a participatory dialogue, they have the opportunity to share their experiences, express their tastes, discuss the difficulties faced and highlight the learning obtained.

The strategies act as a flexible guide that can be adjusted according to the needs of the children; For example, play, as an educational tool, includes cooperative activities that promote collaboration and social interaction, encouraging teamwork and problem-solving. Likewise, learning through symbolic play encourages children to participate in real-life representations, which allows them to develop social and linguistic skills. Each strategy is designed to enhance specific skills and abilities, adapting to the observations and needs identified by the teacher.

### **Learning Workshops**

The workshops are dynamic and participatory educational spaces designed to promote the integral development of children in their first years of life, through these, social, emotional and motor skills are strengthened, while new knowledge is acquired. For its planning, it is essential to adopt a constructivist approach that allows children to build their own learning through interaction with their environment, turning each experience into a meaningful and contextualized process.

These spaces promote active participation, dialogue and cooperation among children, creating an enriching learning environment, at the time of their design, teachers must consider the individual interests and needs of each child, incorporating creative play as a key strategy to stimulate their natural curiosity. In addition, the workshops are planned in a flexible way, allowing them to adapt to the different learning rhythms and guaranteeing an inclusive and effective educational experience.

By properly planning and applying both individual and group workshops, a positive academic growth of children is achieved, developing an interest in learning throughout their lives; Because the workshops offer multiple benefits for children, including the strengthening of social skills such as communication and cooperation, in addition to the development of fine and gross motor skills, they promote creativity, critical thinking and the ability to solve problems, essential skills for their growth and subsequent success in life.

### **Learning Experiences**

Learning experiences are born from the natural interest of children, awakening in them joy and amazement for learning, which is why it is essential that these experiences promote the development of specific skills aligned with the areas of learning and development, thus ensuring an attractive and meaningful educational process. For the Early Childhood Education Curriculum (2014), learning experiences are: "As a set of challenging experiences and activities, intentionally designed by the teacher, which arise from the interest of the children, producing joy and amazement, with the purpose of promoting the development of the skills that arise in the areas of learning and development." (p. 44). For a learning experience to be effective, it must meet certain essential characteristics, ensure the active participation of all children, respect their learning rhythms and individual styles, and integrate relevant cultural and contextual elements.

In addition, it must promote positive interactions between children and adults in an environment free of tensions, encourage the free expression of ideas and feelings within clear rules that value diversity, and present concrete problems that are relevant to their daily lives, it is key to stimulate inquiry and reflection through curiosity, exploration and imagination, avoiding providing answers before children ask questions or reach their own conclusions. Finally, educational environments must be contextualized to offer varied and enriching experiences, taking into account the sociocultural conditions of the children.

### **Art in Early Childhood Education**

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific

advancement and its benefits". Art is a manifestation of the culture of peoples, society and personal experiences, functioning as a manifestation of the imagination and the human capacity to communicate in a symbolic and unique way, beyond being just a skill or technique to create artistic expressions.

For Agirre (2005), art provides "elements to interpret the ethos of culture and personal sensitivity" (p. 336), art encompasses a variety of forms of human expression aimed at transmitting ideas, emotions and experiences, art is a form of creative and visual expression that allows communicating ideas, feelings and concepts through different sensory media, such as shapes, colors, textures and sounds, offering multiple possibilities for exploration and communication through different media.

Art, in its various manifestations such as drawing, painting, writing, music or dance, offers children a valuable tool to express their everyday emotions and feelings. Activities such as painting a picture, writing in a journal or composing a song allow them to process and communicate their fears, anxieties and sadness. For some, art becomes a means of therapy and emotional support, helping them to cope with stress, loneliness and traumatic situations.

Referring to Morin (1999), "Education should favor the natural aptitude of the mind to ask and solve essential questions and correlatively stimulate the full use of general intelligence" (p. 17). In the field of early education, art transcends simple visual expression and becomes a key pedagogical strategy that allows children to explore, experiment and construct their perception of the world.

Continuing with Morin (1999) who says "This maximum use requires the free exercise of the most expanded and liveliest faculty in childhood and adolescence: curiosity, which is very often extinguished by instruction, when it is, on the contrary, stimulated or, if dormant, awakened (p. 17), from painting and drawing to music, theater and dance, these creative expressions offer a space where children can express themselves freely, thus favoring their integral development. This creative process allows them to experiment with different materials and forms, stimulating their imagination and enhancing their sensory and cognitive abilities.

Art in Early Childhood Education can fulfill multiple functions, beyond encouraging creativity, it provides a way for children to express themselves emotionally, allowing them to communicate their thoughts, emotions and experiences in a non-verbal way; this is especially important in the early stages of development, when language is still in the process of acquisition and structuring.

The planning of artistic activities in early education should consider the playful and exploratory nature of children; it is essential that these activities be flexible, allowing each child to experiment and create at his or her own learning pace. The application of artistic strategies at this stage should be based on a multisensory approach, where not only vision is stimulated, but also touch, hearing, smell and, in some cases, taste. This holistic approach enriches the learning experience, promotes meaningful learning and contributes to the development of more complex thinking.

The benefits of art in Early Childhood Education are multiple, among which we can highlight:

Helps the development of fine motor skills as children manipulate different art materials.

It fosters creativity and divergent thinking, essential skills for learning and problem solving.

Art fosters language development and communication, as it allows children to describe and share their creations.

It becomes a tool for emotional expression, helping children to identify, understand and manage their feelings.

Teachers can provide general topics or suggestions, but it is key that children have the freedom to interpret and create according to their own ideas; for this, it is necessary to provide a suitable environment for artistic practice, with access to a variety of materials such as paints, crayons, clay and recycled objects, thus encouraging free expression without limitations.

In this process, the teacher role is to act as a facilitator and attentive observer, open to interpreting and valuing the artistic expressions of the children, recognizing their creative efforts and motivating them to continue exploring; in addition, the teacher can guide reflections on their creations, helping them to better understand their own creative process and strengthening their personal development.

Ros (2004) on art states "Artistic activity, multiple and integrating, has different functions in different cultures, historical periods and social groups, but perhaps the most important is to achieve communion, produce harmony in the personality, give pleasure, reflect life and reality" (p. 2). Art as an educational tool plays a fundamental role in the integral and creative development of children, since it provides them with a space for emotional expression, strengthens their motor and cognitive skills, and favors their social and emotional growth.

By integrating art into the Early Childhood Education curriculum, teachers create a dynamic and enriching learning environment that leaves a significant mark on children's development. Knowledge of art is essential; its incorporation from the first years of life allows it to be integrated into children's daily lives; in this way, art transcends routine by proposing new strategies that facilitate communication, evoke emotions, generate reflections and transmit ideas through various forms of expression.

### **Visual plastic strategies**

Sarlé (2014), expresses that "neuroscientific, evolutionary and pedagogical research has highlighted that creativity and artistic education, through music, painting, theater, singing or dancing, have to be part of the fundamental axes of a good educational project. (p.7). The plastic arts have an essential role in child development, because they promote creativity, sensory exploration and the strengthening of cognitive and motor skills, children can interact with various artistic media, such as painting, drawing, sculpture and collage, which gives them the opportunity to express their emotions, thoughts and experiences in a visual and concrete way.

Continuing with what is expressed by Sarlé (2014), "These activities are not to be considered as separate elements from the rest of the actions that children experience in their family or school environment." (p. 7), children develop a greater ability to observe the environment and find unique ways to communicate; the main focus lies in the creative process rather than in the final result, promoting exploration, experimentation and self-expression through different techniques and materials.

On the other hand, we must take into account what is expressed by Muñiz, in Andueza (2016), "In a natural way, the child uses drawing as the first means of communication and plastic expression, before writing and even speech." (p.12). These activities stimulate cognitive development by improving observation skills, attention and understanding of concepts such as color, shape and texture; participating in activities such as drawing and cutting out helps children strengthen both their fine and gross motor skills, favoring their coordination and physical dexterity.

Similarly, Muñiz, in Andueza (2016), expresses that "Art should be one of the main allies in the educational task." (p.12), this is how art offers children a means to express their emotions, thoughts and experiences, which facilitates emotional recognition and understanding; through these experiences, they develop their creativity and critical thinking freely, making decisions about their creations without limitations, this process also contributes to strengthen their self-esteem and self-confidence, essential aspects for their socioemotional development.

### **Plastic arts techniques classification**

Plastic techniques classification may differ according to the used mean, the style and individual preferences. For this study, a general classification that includes both two-dimensional and three-dimensional techniques is taken into account:

**Two-dimensional techniques:** this group includes drawing, blind drawing, biro, melted crayons, melted crayons, lemon and drying with heat, pluminism, fibrons, colored pencils, black pencil: in relation to painting which is an ideal resource to promote artistic and cognitive development; it consists of the application of pigments in liquid state, such as watercolors or tempera, on different surfaces, such as paper or cardboard. Through this practice, children can explore their creativity and expressive skills.

**Three-dimensional techniques:** applied through the absorption of water or paint, which causes transformations and allows exploration on different surfaces, such as leaves or other specific materials, in this group of techniques we have collage, assembling, modeling, origami, kirigami.

### **Visual art**

The visual arts in childhood play a key role in the cognitive, emotional and social development of children. Through activities such as drawing, painting and sculpture, children explore both their environment and their inner world, strengthening fundamental skills.

From the cognitive aspect, art stimulates the capacity for observation, concentration and attention to detail, as they identify patterns, shapes and colors, improve their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In the emotional realm, the visual arts serve as a means of expression that allows children to communicate their emotions, fears and joys non-verbally, facilitating the development of their emotional intelligence and understanding of their own feelings and those of others. Artistic creation generates personal satisfaction and reinforces self-esteem, since children feel proud of their works and valued when they receive recognition for them.

On the social side, artistic activities foster cooperation and interaction, as children can collaborate on creative projects, exchange ideas and solve challenges together. Art fosters respect for cultural diversity, allowing children to discover different artistic styles and learn about cultural expressions from different parts of the world.

Through the visual arts, children have the opportunity to explore and become familiar with different techniques and textures through a wide range of art materials, such as crayons, paints, watercolors, tempera, paper and clay. These resources allow them to tell stories and express their ideas through images, strengthening their capacity for visual expression and non-verbal communication. They also stimulate their imagination and creativity, motivating them to create works that reflect their inner world and fantasies.

Art fosters inclusion and cultural diversity, giving children the opportunity to learn about and value different cultures through creative activities; at the preschool level, participation in artistic experiences also reinforces self-esteem and confidence, as it provides them with a space for expression and the possibility of receiving positive feedback on their creations.

### **Classification of the visual arts**

The visual arts are divided into different categories according to their particularities and forms of representation, covering both two-dimensional and three-dimensional expressions, which are detailed below:

**Two-dimensional:** in this group we have photography, engraving, performance.

**Three-dimensional:** in this group we have sculpture, installation, scenography.

## RESULTS

### Teachers

The study conducted through the application of an interview with teachers revealed the following:

65.9% of teachers consider drawing and painting as the main visual plastic strategies to facilitate children's learning; on the other hand, 11.5% mentioned the use of engraving and stamping, while 22.6.4% highlighted other techniques such as cutting, collage and modeling, considering all these strategies as valid options. There is a diversity of approaches in the application of artistic tools in teaching, which contributes to enriching the learning experience and allows adapting to the different styles and preferences of the children. There is also evidence of an inclination of teachers towards the combination of multiple plastic-visual strategies.

76.3% of the teachers receive occasional training in the teaching of visual-plastic strategies, while 12.1% indicated that they always receive it, 5.5% almost always and 6.1% have never received this type of training. A diversity is observed in the frequency with which teachers receive training on visual-plastic strategies, which could have significant implications for professional development and the quality of teaching in this specific area.

83.5% of the teachers completely agree that visual and plastic strategies enhance individual and group expression and creativity in children, while 16.5% agree. It is essential to incorporate activities that integrate both plastic and visual artistic strategies, such as painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, pointillism, and tearing. These forms of artistic expression allow children to communicate, explore their environment and express their inner world, emotions and sensations. Through imagination, fantasy and creativity, they can develop new structures and resources in both individual and group activities.

It was observed that 66.4% of the surveyed state that they can always help children to regulate their emotions through the use of visual plastic strategies, while 24.7% state that they almost always achieve this and the remaining 8.9% mention that they can only sometimes contribute to this process. Teachers perceive positively the effectiveness of visual-visual strategies in the development of emotional intelligence, considering them a valuable tool in the educational process. Activities such as drawing, modeling, cutting and three-dimensional collage, among other techniques, not only facilitate the identification and expression of emotions, but also enrich the emotional vocabulary of children, promoting their well-being in a creative and meaningful way.

### Children

The data obtained from the observation sheets for children between 4 and 6 years of age are as follows:

It was observed that 74% of the children are in the process of demonstrating enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation when participating in plastic-visual activities, while 25% are in the initial stage and 1% have already developed this capacity. It is essential to promote an environment of security and trust between teachers and children to strengthen their bond and enjoyment in visual-plastic activities. Intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm in these practices not only reflect a genuine interest, but also encourage self-expression and integral development. These experiences, in addition to being fun, play a fundamental role in the formation of confident, participatory and motivated children throughout their school career, contributing to their identity and emotional, cognitive and social growth.

Seventy-four percent of the children are in the process of developing plastic-visual representations through their imagination, while 16% have already acquired this ability and 10% are in the initial stage.

Most of the children are in an active phase of exploration and development of their creative abilities through visual-plastic representations; a smaller group has managed to consolidate these skills, while others are still beginning their learning process; artistic creation based on imagination is fundamental for the integral development of children, since it strengthens their creativity, personal expression, motor skills, problem-solving ability, self-confidence and aesthetic appreciation, allowing them to experiment with fantasy, imagination and the discovery of the world around them.

Eighty-nine percent of children are in the process of expressing their emotions, ideas or narratives through their plastic-visual creations, while 14% have already acquired this ability and 7% are in the initial stage. It is essential to design educational strategies and programs that adjust to the different needs and levels of artistic development of children, providing them with the necessary time and support to strengthen their expressive skills. Visual plastic creations represent a significant means for children to communicate their thoughts, emotions and experiences, allowing them to experience a sense of accomplishment and strengthen their confidence in their own abilities.

It was observed that 71% of the students are in the process of identifying the emotions they perceive, while 22% already recognize them and 7% are in an initial stage. Children are in a developmental stage in the ability to recognize emotions, so it is essential to encourage their expression in different situations or visual representations, this process not only contributes to a balanced emotional development, but also strengthens their communication skills by helping them to verbalize what they feel and better understand both their own emotions and those of others.

### **REFLECTION**

The observations made in the pre-school classes showed a limited application of visual plastic strategies by the teachers in the classrooms studied; a lack of interest or willingness to participate in these activities is perceived, which could be due to the scarce incorporation of art from an early age. This lack prevents children from adequately developing their emotional skills, since they do not have spaces to control and express their feelings, prioritizing instead cognitive development without considering the impact of art on emotional intelligence.

One of the identified factors in this problem is the inadequate distribution of the schedule for plastic expression classes. With an approximate duration of 30 minutes, these sessions are insufficient for infants to fully engage in art and relate it to their emotional development. The lack of time limits their capacity for socialization and self-expression through artistic activities, thus affecting their integral growth.

Another relevant aspect is the need for more teacher training in the artistic field; the lack of specific training in this field hinders the implementation of innovative methodologies that integrate art in the teaching-learning process, which restricts the use of spaces that could enhance learning and promote the socialization of children through interaction with their environment.

The lack of planning of activities that stimulate creativity and artistic expression generates a scarce execution of exercises related to art and corporal expression, limiting the development of emotional intelligence in infants, hindering the formation of bonds that allow them to explore their environment and strengthen their self-knowledge and relationship with others.

There is insufficient use of concrete materials for artistic creation, as teachers avoid using them for fear that the children will get dirty. This restriction directly affects the infants' artistic and corporal expression, creativity and imagination, limiting their ability to relate to their environment and freely explore their own inner world.

The development of emotional intelligence is a progressive and constant process that requires patience, consistency and a suitable environment for its strengthening; from the first years of life, it is essential to provide children with tools that allow them to identify, understand and regulate their emotions effectively, this not only contributes to their emotional well-being, but also has a positive impact on their interpersonal relationships, their academic performance and their ability to face challenges throughout life.

To achieve optimal development of emotional intelligence, it is essential to provide children with continuous and structured support, which involves fostering emotional self-awareness, helping them to recognize their feelings and express them assertively; it is important to teach them self-regulation strategies, promoting the ability to manage stress, frustration and other difficult emotions.

Joint work between the family, teachers and the educational community plays a key role in this process; at home, parents can reinforce this learning through affective communication, example and the creation of an environment of trust and security; at school, teachers can integrate activities and dynamics that promote empathy, conflict resolution and cooperation among peers; the educational community can implement programs and resources that strengthen socioemotional education, ensuring that children receive comprehensive support in their emotional growth.

Ultimately, emotional intelligence is not only a key competence for individual development, but also a fundamental pillar for the construction of a more empathetic, understanding and resilient society.

Visual plastic strategies are educational methods designed to enhance early childhood learning and development through the use of graphic elements and artistic materials. These strategies are based on the principle that children learn best when they have access to diverse sensory experiences and are given the opportunity to explore and create through visual and plastic activities.

These activities are not only engaging and motivating, but also contribute to the overall development of children at the early childhood level, promote academic learning, stimulate creative thinking, emotional expression and communication, and promote inclusion in the school environment.

To maximize their benefits in child development, it is essential that educators implement these strategies effectively in the classroom, ensuring a dynamic and enriching approach to the teaching-learning process.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The application of visual plastic strategies in children from 4 to 6 years of age creates enriching experiences that not only strengthen their emotional intelligence, but also establish a solid emotional foundation that will serve them throughout their lives.

Artistic activities not only favor self-reflection and individual expression, but also promote positive interactions with their environment, strengthening emotional bonds, fostering creativity and facilitating the understanding and communication of emotions.

It is essential for teachers to implement visual plastic strategies at the initial level, since they facilitate the understanding of abstract concepts, encourage creativity, personal expression, sensorimotor and complex thinking, as well as active participation, these educational tools are key to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies that will benefit children in later stages of their academic training.

The theoretical principles of visual-plastic strategies in early education enrich the teaching-learning process and favor the integral development of children; these strategies stimulate imagination,

creativity, synthesis, individual expression and social interaction, being essential to strengthen critical thinking and problem solving in everyday situations.

Visual plastic strategies play a crucial role in stimulating the integral development of children, enhancing their cognitive, emotional and motor skills, through an enriching environment that favors meaningful learning, the development of fine motor skills and visual-plastic perception, as well as strengthening creative expression, understanding of abstract concepts and social and emotional skills.

Evaluating teachers' knowledge of these strategies in early education is essential within the teaching-learning process; training and professional updating of educators in the artistic field allows maximizing the positive impact of these strategies in the cognitive, emotional and social development of children, providing them with experiences that stimulate their growth and learning during the first years of life.


Understanding the theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence in early education is key for the comprehensive development of children, because it will allow generating meaningful interactions with infants, identifying their abilities and enhancing them through appropriate strategies that favor positive and sustainable growth; thus, preparing them to face life's challenges in a resilient manner.

Exploring the components of emotional intelligence in children highlights the importance of their early development, the ability to recognize, understand and manage emotions from infancy lays the foundation for emotional well-being, helping children to become aware of their feelings, regulate them and develop social skills that allow them to interact effectively throughout their lives.

Assessing factors such as emotional awareness, expression, emotion regulation and social skills at this stage provides a clear picture of children's level of emotional intelligence. Since most are still in the process of acquiring it, early identification of strengths and areas for improvement provides a solid foundation for the implementation of effective artistic strategies to enhance their emotional development.

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