

Empathy, post-pandemia and coexistence in early childhood children

Empatía, postpandemia y convivencia en niños de primera infancia
Empatia, pós-pandemia e convivência em crianças da primeira infância

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Abstract

This research work addressed the issue of emotion management in early childhood children, in the light of empathy, considering the post-pandemic context and its relationship with coexistence in the formal public education of the district of Bogota. As main objective, a pedagogical proposal built for the strengthening of coexistence was proposed and developed. Methodologically, a qualitative approach was followed, based on action research where the students' impressions were systematized and questionnaires, observation and field diary were applied. For the analysis of the information, the categories empathy, coexistence, pedagogical practices and post-pandemic were defined. The results of the application were mostly positive to the extent that the pedagogical proposal was successfully developed and allowed the children to generate spaces for dialogue and self-recognition, in addition to improving classroom dynamics. As conclusions, it was found that the pandemic affected the cognitive and socialization processes in children and families; the importance of addressing the emotional management of children and the need to generate scenarios that enrich the discussion on the subject is highlighted.

Key words: didactic strategies, virtual teaching, Ecuadorian secondary education.

Resumen

En este trabajo de investigación se abordó el tema del manejo de emociones en niños de primera infancia, a la luz de la empatía, considerando el contexto postpandémico y su relación con la convivencia en el ámbito de la educación formal pública del distrito de Bogotá. Como objetivo principal se planteó y desarrolló una propuesta pedagógica construida para el fortalecimiento de la convivencia. Metodológicamente se siguió un enfoque cualitativo,

basado en la investigación acción donde se sistematizaron las impresiones de los estudiantes y se aplicaron cuestionarios, la observación y el diario de campo. Para el análisis de la información se definieron las categorías empatía, convivencia, prácticas pedagógicas y pospandemia. Los resultados de la aplicación fueron en su mayoría positivos en la medida que la propuesta pedagógica se desarrolló de manera exitosa y permitió a los niños generar espacios de diálogo y auto reconocimiento., además se mejoraron las dinámicas del aula. Como conclusiones se pudo constatar que la pandemia dejó afectaciones en los procesos cognitivos y de socialización en los niños y en las familias; se destaca la importancia de abordar la gestión emocional de los niños y la necesidad de generar escenarios que enriquezcan la discusión sobre el tema.

Key words: estrategias didácticas, enseñanza virtual, educación media ecuatoriana.

Resumo

Este trabalho de investigação abordou a questão da gestão das emoções em crianças da primeira infância, à luz da empatia, considerando o contexto pós-pandêmico e a sua relação com a convivência no âmbito da educação pública formal no distrito de Bogotá. O objetivo principal foi desenvolver uma proposta pedagógica para fortalecer a convivência. Metodologicamente, seguiu-se uma abordagem qualitativa, baseada na investigação-ação, em que se sistematizaram as impressões dos alunos e se aplicaram questionários, observação e um diário de campo. Para a análise das informações, foram definidas as categorias empatia, convivência, práticas pedagógicas e pós-pandemia. Os resultados da aplicação foram majoritariamente positivos na medida em que a proposta pedagógica foi desenvolvida com sucesso e permitiu às crianças gerar espaços de diálogo e auto-reconhecimento, bem como melhorar a dinâmica da sala de aula. As conclusões foram que a pandemia afetou os processos cognitivos e de socialização nas crianças e nas famílias; destaca-se a importância de abordar a gestão emocional das crianças e a necessidade de gerar cenários que enriqueçam a discussão sobre o tema.

Palavras chave: estratégias didáticas, ensino virtual, ensino secundário equatoriano.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental components of early childhood education has to do with the generation of experiences and socialization spaces

through which mental structures are established and molded, at this age children begin the path to learn to manage their emotions and school spaces are the favorite ones for this, but we have just faced as a society the confinement generated by the Covid 19, and that has made children arrive with other types of needs. It is understood, then the school as the scenario where "children begin to identify possible alternative solutions to problems of different order and take the initiative to solve them according to their accumulated knowledge" (SED., 2019) then we are faced with children who did not have that opportunity and who arrive at school after spending almost two years in confinement, ordered by the Ministry of the Interior (2020) as a measure to try to stop the spread of the virus.

Alarming are the reports that are known today in Colombia regarding the impact of the pandemic and confinement in children, for example, the Colombian Institute of Neurosciences in 2022 mentions that behaviors related to mental health and behavior reported in the survey mainly affect children between 4 and 12 years old. This situation is reflected daily in classrooms and translated into coexistence problems, when it was necessary to assume again the presentiality without taking into account in a concrete way the affectations generated by the pandemic, and there are several entities of world order that state that the cognitive processes of children were the most affected.

Under this scenario and taking into account that according to Restrepo (2022) "social isolation brings as consequences to this population (children), high levels of emotional and social stress, psychological problems" (p.4), a group of kindergarten children composed of 12 girls, 11 children who mostly had not been schooled, were identified as having great difficulty in listening and very low levels of tolerance, which triggers conflictive situations of coexistence. In view of this situation, the following question was posed as a question guiding the research exercise: How can empathy be strengthened in kindergarten children? From this, the general objective was constructed as strengthening school coexistence through the empowerment of empathy in the children of the kindergarten grade, by means of a pedagogical proposal. And then the specific objectives. a) To identify the origin and the dynamics related to the coexistence problems of the students of the kindergarten grade. B) To design and implement a pedagogical proposal that makes it possible to improve the dynamics of coexistence in the students of the Kindergarten grade. C) To analyze

the way in which this proposal contributes to the strengthening of empathy and coexistence in this group of students.

When addressing this issue, it is important to note that in Spain Albendea C, B. M (2016) made a pedagogical proposal where they presented some intervention sessions in relation to emotional intelligence called Emotiva, which was worked with early childhood education students in order to show the importance of managing these emotions in one's own life and then be able to work with students. They work from a program called "educating in positive" with parents, training of trainers and children, with the purpose of training them in emotional competences. This is a very significant precedent when it comes to thinking about the relationship between emotion and the educational process.

In Chile, psychologist Troncosa (2022) conducted a review of the way in which social changes have influenced the mental health of students, their families and teachers, as they are forced to face online classes. This brought to light a socioemotional crisis that is translated into aggressiveness, lack of empathy... which also affects brain functions, after which he proposes some challenges for the educational system, mainly related to the adequate pedagogical work of emotional skills. Challenges for which Colombian education is not yet prepared, but for which exercises such as the one presented in this document arise, and which seeks to make visible and propose alternative solutions to this problem.

Based on the above, Sánchez (2021) in the Cuban context brings to the table the discussion related to the impact of covid 19 in young people and children, through a study where he concludes that the most affected population were school children under 10 to 16 years of age, male, from dysfunctional homes, and from unfavorable economic conditions. Its results are related to sleep disorders, behaviors resulting from overexposure to screens and psychopathological alterations and also recommends seeking strategies to detect and manage risk situations arising from the pandemic and confinement. It is then an imperative need to give relevance to the implications of covid in the child population, to begin to develop actions to mitigate and protect the emotional health of children who daily are attending the classrooms of the capital district.

Because as stated by Rengel & Calle (2020) when they enunciate the problems and psychological changes that children face today, they refer to changes in behavior and at the emotional level, changes in interpersonal relationships, coping with losses, and the consequences

of this, which according to the author have to do mainly with anxiety, violence, stress, post-traumatic stress disorder; we are in time to sit down to listen, observe and analyze, to think and propose actions that teach children to identify and manage their emotions.

When we think of the Colombian context, the magazine *Magisterio* is important because in 2021 it published an edition entitled "Education in times of pandemic" for which the following authors were approached in the research exercise. Duran, Vargas & Becerra (2021) who presents a reflection referred to the big gap in education in urban and rural areas and that due to the conditions of the pandemic increased, within their exercise presents data referred to fixed internet access points in different areas of the country and suggests that the use of mobile points is relevant and proposes to end with some challenges in terms of education and in social terms.

Martinez & Rozo (2021) make an analysis in relation to what happened in pandemic, in the urban area where the confinement occurred with peculiarities such as the assumption that internet access would facilitate learning and teaching processes, concluding that access alone does not guarantee learning; they also state what it meant for families to open the door of their homes to virtual classes and the creativity that emerged from the teachers to maintain the interest of students. While in rural areas, access to ICTs in most cases was null, there the children were perfecting their families' rural or productive skills. In this sense, Marín-Posada, et al (2021) present the results of a research process in which, through a hermeneutic approach, the affectations of the right to education of early childhood children in the suburban peasant territory of Medellín during the pandemic period are analyzed.

Based on the above, Boude & Becerra (2021) make an analysis and reflection that revolves mainly around the way in which institutions had to assume the challenge of continuing with the processes during the pandemic, since they had to continue with the administrative procedures, training processes and teachers had to adapt their courses for virtuality. In addition, they present the results of a research carried out by the Universidad de la Sabana whose objective was to identify the learning process resulting from the pandemic of teachers at all levels of education in Ibero-America, in relation to the use and appropriation of ICTs in the institutions.

Considering this scenario, it is essential to state the contributions that have been made in this regard from the city of Bogota. For this purpose, it is necessary to take into account what was proposed by Alvarez, Unda, García and Orozco (2021) who conducted an

exploratory study whose main objective was to approach the practices of schools between March and December 2020, using instruments such as interviews, focus groups and surveys to members of the educational community in rural and urban areas of the district. They make an interesting exercise, and make visible the pedagogical practices of teachers in relation to their ways of facing the pandemic scenario and end up presenting the arguments that lead them to understand the school in a face-to-face manner as essential for society. Within this context, Jiménez-Jaimes, (2021) through a pedagogical proposal based on music and the song "La piragua", exposes how to work on socio-emotionality with students in the midst of the pandemic, an experience that makes visible the important role of the teacher in the midst of what it meant to be in confinement.

Within the exercise it was proposed to address emotional intelligence, empathy and coexistence, for which the conceptual references adopted are presented below, taking into account that these concepts are still under discussion, the following are the points of view from which they are approached. In the first place, when talking about emotions, Goleman (1995) states that "our emotions, they say, guide us when it comes to facing difficult moments and tasks too important to be left to the intellect alone... each emotion offers a definite disposition to act" (p22) in this sense, it is essential to develop pedagogical actions so that both students and families develop empathy, one of the dimensions of emotional intelligence.

Taking this into account, empathy is understood as "the ability to grasp what another thinks and needs and the sincere connection with their feelings as if they were one's own ... feeling at the same time the desire to comfort and help" (Carpena 2016, cited by Galiani, & Terlato, 2020, p) it is then how through the various processes of socialization how the scenarios are given for egocentrism to decrease and develop this ability that is related to trying to care for the other, which in children requires a long process.

When talking about empathy, it is possible to find two theoretical strands, according to Lopez, Filippett & Richaud. B. (2014) a group of researchers came to affirm that the perception of an emotion in another is activated directly from gestures without cognitive intervention; the other group gave importance to cognitive aspects such as projection and imagination, highlighting the differences between human empathy and similar phenomena observed in other species. These two aspects can be assumed to be complementary, since they have been approached from neuroscience, which has made important contributions to the pedagogical processes we know today,

since the same authors affirm that the development of empathy requires interaction with others. One of the reasons why it is very important to work on empathy with children from an early age is because "if someone is hurt by the pain of others, they are less likely to cause that pain. If they do cause it, they are more likely to want to do something to repair the damage" (Chaux et al, 2008, p129). If spaces can be created for children to develop this skill, conflicts and aggression in the classroom can be significantly reduced.

In reference to school coexistence, it is approached from the approach proposed by Fierro-Evans; Carbajal-Padilla (2019) who propose coexistence as socio-emotional education, an approach through which the development of fundamental social skills for coexistence is proposed, and therefore with the potential to improve interpersonal relationships at school. It is therefore essential for the school environment that the educational community in general has the necessary basis to manage their emotions and relate assertively.

Within the theoretical references, more focused on didactics, we take into account the Pedagogical and curricular guidelines for education in the District (2019) where the work with children is based on two fundamental elements: the pedagogical work axes and the guiding activities for early childhood, which are central to the development of the research exercise to the extent that they are closely linked to generating spaces that enhance the development of emotional skills. Within this document, pedagogical work axes are proposed, understood as follows:

Axis 1 Social and personal development in early childhood: designed to strengthen the security of children and the world around them, seeking to enhance autonomy, participation and identity.

Axis 2 Expression in early childhood: communication through languages and movement: linking the construction of knowledge, their vision of the world and the way to recreate it through words, movement, and all languages; having the body as a fundamental mediator. Axis 3 Experimentation and logical thinking in early childhood: it has to do with the way in which the child understands, situates and acts on his world, here all the questions that arise and is oriented to the construction of hypotheses and the search for explanations are accommodated.

These are elements that are addressed transversally within the practice and that can be configured as an important tool to begin to identify and manage emotions in the school setting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The type of study that was applied within the research exercise is action research, which "implies the dialectical vision between research and action, so that both processes are integrated and complemented through cyclical phases that propose to plan, act, observe and reflect" (Cabrera, 2017, p 143) This allows the teacher to conduct a dialogue between practice and theory through which it is possible to change or resignify pedagogical practices. It then becomes an alternative through which an answer is given to problems that arise in the daily life of the classroom, for the purposes of this research it makes it possible to investigate in a practical and concrete way in relation to the effects of the pandemic on the emotional skills of early childhood children.

As inclusion criteria for this exercise, it was taken into account that the population should be from the district public education system, children of early childhood age who were in their first year of schooling, that in the year of the pandemic they were between two and three years old, and that the group had coexistence problems related to the lack of tolerance and listening.

During the development of the exercise, the following stages were proposed:

Initial stage: research is conducted in relation to the identified problem, the viability of the proposed problem, in relation to its justification, and the collection of inputs that allow a systematic approach to the issues. A first approach is made to look with research eyes at the dynamics that take place in the classroom with early childhood children. In addition, the necessary elements to build the theoretical framework are investigated.

Intermediate stage: The type of research is identified and the necessary instruments for the collection of information are built, in addition to the pedagogical proposal. Progress is made in relation to the necessary paperwork to apply the proposal with the students. The implementation of the proposal begins.

Final stage: Culminate the implementation of the proposal, analysis of the information collected, construction of conclusions and socialization of the research exercise.

For the development of the exercise, questionnaires, participatory observation and field diaries were implemented, instruments that can be used with children aged 4 and 5 years old who are still in the process of pronouncing words well and understanding what they want to say. The instruments were validated through a format designed for this purpose, by a licensed preschool teacher, master in pedagogy with 37 years of experience, giving a favorable concept for

their implementation, since they are written in such a way that the children understand and the pedagogical proposal responds to the proposed objectives.

Observation is understood as "an intentional and enlightened perception. Intentional because it is done with a specific object, illustrated because it is guided in some way by a body of knowledge" (Bunge cited by Benguría etl, 2010, p. 4) for the purposes of this exercise, it is observed on some occasions in a participatory manner, to determine the way in which attitudes are expressed in everyday life that denote lack of empathy of children when living together in the school setting.

A questionnaire is assumed as "a set of questions about the facts or aspects that are of interest in an investigation and that are answered by the respondents" (Torres, 2021) and is implemented with preschool children to establish in some way their perceptions of the proposed dynamics, their emotions and those of their peers.

And the field diary as a basic instrument of research and training, because it allows us to collect significant data, in addition to reflecting on them, analyzing and systematizing them" (Jurado, 2011 p175). (Jurado, 2011 p175), an aspect that is fundamental when analyzing and returning to the dynamics of this group of students.

RESULTS

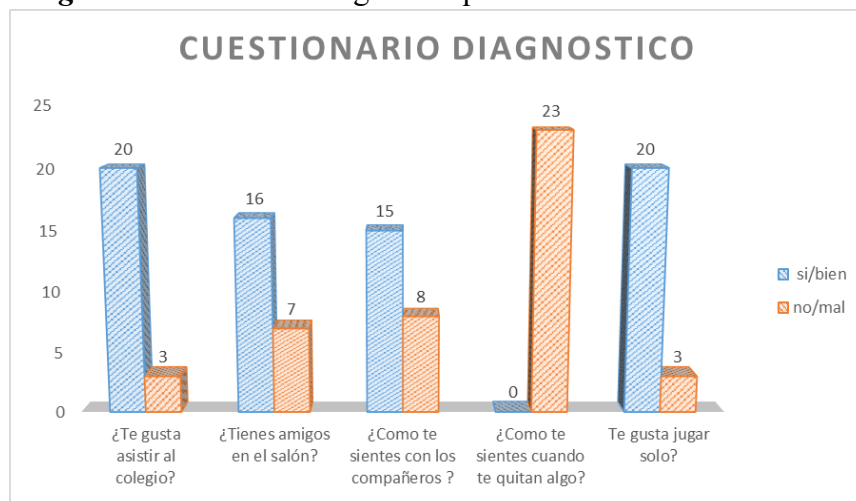
The results presented here are presented in relation to the research objectives set out above. In this sense, the following paragraphs present the results related to the first objective, related to identifying the origin of coexistence problems.

Based on the field diary, it was determined that the group is constantly immersed in conflictive situations that end up in physical aggressions to peers, the trigger in almost all situations has to do with the need to have something just for himself, the exaggerated egocentrism of all children led to play situations always ending in pinches and blows.

Due to the repetitive nature of the situation, during a pedagogical day, the topic was raised with the parents, where they inquired about what happened to the families during the pandemic, and they informally shared the way in which they experienced this scenario. Many of the children assumed the confinement without the company of other children, seeing their parents suffer to get food, or with their grandparents. As part of the first activity related to the pedagogical proposal, a questionnaire was sent home to inquire about it and a

questionnaire was applied with the students, the result of which was the following:

Image 1. Results of the diagnostic questionnaire



Source: Own elaboration.

From the implementation of the diagnostic questionnaire designed for the students, it can be concluded that most of them at some time of the day have felt that they do not like to attend school, either because of the dynamics of the institution or because they want to be with their family all the time. In relation to the friends they have in the classroom, it can be affirmed that more than half of the children say that they have friends in the classroom, however, they verbally state that they do not have more than two, and affirm that most of the time they feel good with their classmates.

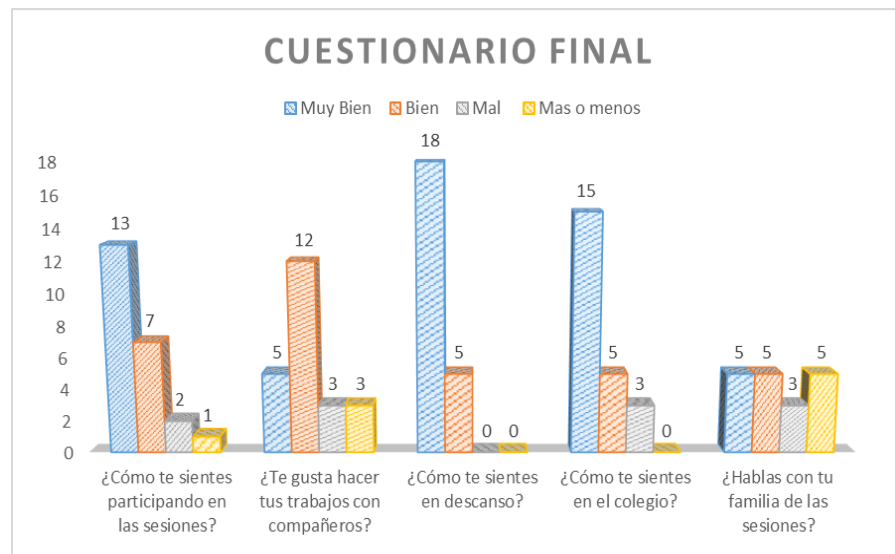
All the children say that they feel bad when something is taken away from them, and some verbally state that they would like to have all the toys to themselves always, while only three children say that they do not like to play alone. These results lead us to think that the pandemic made them adapt to playing alone, and increased the egocentrism typical of this age group. This generates that when developing class dynamics, problems arise that are translated into aggressions, sometimes physical, and difficulty to listen and listen to each other.

In relation to the second objective related to the design and implementation of a pedagogical proposal to improve coexistence problems.

Based on the conceptual references and the information gathered in the initial stage, a pedagogical proposal was created. The work

sessions have to do with self-recognition and knowledge of the environment based on feelings and the different ways of managing them in relation to myself and the people who share the context. Six pedagogical work sessions are planned, with the purpose of developing one per week, preferably on the first day of class, in order to develop an observation during the week related to the purposes of the session and the research exercise. Due to the dynamics of the institutions, the sessions should be divided in two, so that they are approached without abrupt interruptions, and also to capture the children's attention in a more effective way. Within the final exercises, the final questionnaire was applied to the students and the following results were obtained.

Image 2. Results of the final questionnaire



Source: Own elaboration

From the implementation of the sessions with the students and from the final questionnaire we can say that the receptivity to the pedagogical proposal was good to the extent that most of the children say they felt very well or good, also to the extent that more children say they like working in groups, compared to the initial questionnaire, regarding rest all children say they feel well or very well, which compared to the initial questionnaire has been a significant improvement. Regarding how they feel at school most children feel good or very good, which is also an improvement, the three children who still do not feel good is because they have the particularity that they attend class irregularly. In relation to the

dialogue with the family, we can say that this is an item that can still be improved, since not many children talk about the sessions at home. In perspective, we can affirm that a pedagogical proposal based on empathy can contribute significantly to the strengthening of emotional intelligence and coexistence in early childhood children; however, it is important to keep in mind that this exercise constitutes the starting point of a long road from which long-term results will emerge.

In relation to the third objective referred to analyze the way in which this pedagogical proposal contributes to the improvement of coexistence, and after having implemented the information collection instruments, it can be said that the development of the proposal is configured as the first step on a long road, but that the children receive it with great interest; the activities, by departing a little from the traditional elements, awaken a sense of curiosity in them that leads them to be always attentive and expectant in relation to the instructions and dynamics proposed. This improves the dynamics within the space and contributes to the objective of providing tools for the construction of a harmonious coexistence within the school.

In addition, it has been observed that children show an interest in knowing the feelings of their classmates, which promotes a friendlier and more collaborative school environment. However, it is important to keep in mind that it is important to strengthen, in addition to empathy, the way in which I express what I feel, since this group of students does not yet have the necessary tools to identify the type of emotion that leads them to act in a certain way.

Self-knowledge is fundamental to the extent that it is through their work, in young children, that the basic notion of empathy is understood. In this sense, traits of empathy were observed in their interactions, which significantly improves communication and therefore conflict resolution, which, although the teacher is still an indispensable mediator in this process, significant improvements can be observed in the way they relate to each other.

One of the most important results of this exercise has to do with the decrease of aggressiveness to get what is wanted, now it is replaced by a dialogic communication, which is sometimes effective and sometimes not so effective, but it is an element that sows the seed of tolerance and empathy in the coexistence relationships of these children.

It can be affirmed, then, that a pedagogical proposal that addresses the issue of empathy and emotional development in early childhood children, also addressing the needs that arose after the confinement

stage, opens the way to focus on the mental health of our children and the way in which it is managed to strengthen the scenarios of harmonious coexistence. In addition, it is necessary to mention that, for this type of exercises, family support and the dynamics that are generated there must be hand in hand with the elements that are worked on in the classroom, otherwise the child does not see the significance of the proposed activities and their teachings.

When we talk about confinement in a country like Colombia, and in a city like Bogota, it is immediately related to the way in which the recent global health crisis was faced, we think about the difficulty to keep a job, to get money for food and housing, to take the children to school, but we rarely think about the way in which emotions were managed and the effects that this will have on our lives in the future, and even less we think about the impact this will have on the lives of children who for almost two years were socializing through a screen. As stated by Rocero, etl (2021) "Children are the hidden victims in the post pandemic effects, they even drag the effects of their parents such as: poverty, family violence, conflicts, death of family members or bereavement". (p 238) which is reaffirmed daily in district classrooms.

Through this research exercise, a group of children is given a voice, to the extent that it is identified that they have difficulty to coexist harmoniously in a school setting, and a series of pedagogical actions are proposed that seek to strengthen school coexistence through the enhancement of empathy, giving importance to the approach of emotions and opening the door to think about the need to promote the management of emotions in children from an early age. For as stated by Troncosa (2022) quoting Sandi & Haller (2015) "confinement has affected brain development. The brain is essentially a social organ, when it is deprived of the social bond its development is affected ...associated behaviors of lack of self-regulation, aggressiveness... and irritability are manifested" (p 96) which highlights the imperative need to know the group of students and from this determine how to address the problems related to the management of emotions.

In order to deepen the discussion related to coexistence in post-pandemic times in early childhood children, it is important to put on the table the affective responsibility that families have in relation to the dynamics related to the management of emotions, since this is the first stage of socialization and it is there where the necessary tools should be provided to interact assertively with others. However, in the Bogota context, family dynamics rarely give relevance to feelings and assign that and other infinite responsibilities to the teacher and

the school, it is then where it is reaffirmed that "empathy resides in the family, and it is they who must enhance it in the most appropriate way, and encourage it from childhood in their children." (Rivero, 2019, P 12) It is evident that children's behaviors are a reflection of what they live at home on a daily basis, in that order of ideas, the work with families should be more emphatic.

The implementation of a pedagogical proposal focused on improving the dynamics of school coexistence has a potential positive impact on the socioemotional development of the students; however, it is necessary to understand that the results of this type of exercises are neither palpable, nor do they occur in the short term. This was one of the reasons why in the exercise of constructing the pedagogical proposal it was decided to develop workshops on a weekly basis, since it allows reinforcing the content during the week and observing the receptivity of the children in a period that is not mediated by immediacy.

It is also important to take into account that the learning processes in school scenarios of children should be mediated by a teacher who is critical, reflective and who is clear about his or her training purposes with the group of students to effectively determine a situation that deserves the necessary attention to initiate a research exercise. This taking into account that educating in the context of Bogota is complex to the extent that there are an infinite number of variables, and that the exercise of research requires time, which many times is not available, and an ethical commitment that transcends the walls of the school.

In closing, it is clear that it is essential to begin to pay the attention that the management of emotions in children deserves, because, although the confinement stage is over, it is still a matter of research to determine what were the effects in terms of the integral development of children and even adults. In this sense, the discussion has to do with the way in which the teaching exercise and the dynamics of the school allow me to consciously and systematically address the elements related to emotional intelligence in both teachers and students.

CONCLUSIONS

The research exercise presented here highlights the importance of working on strengthening empathy and social and emotional skills in early childhood children as a strategy to improve school coexistence in the post-pandemic context. From this perspective, it highlights the

need to design innovative and creative pedagogical proposals to effectively address coexistence problems in the school environment. The results obtained in this research may serve as a reference for future research in the field of education and child psychology.

This exercise had limitations in terms of implementation of the proposal to the extent that the dynamics of the institutions often slowed down the processes, the times did not coincide with what was planned and therefore the sessions had to be modified. It is important to keep in mind that these dynamics related to emotional intelligence yield long-term results, for this reason the important thing is to sow seeds and if you really want to track the impact, follow the group of students in a systematic way.

It is suggested as future lines of work to deepen the relationship between empathy, school coexistence and the effects of the pandemic in other stages of education, and not only with students, linking families in a more committed way in these processes and also working on this aspect with teachers. Also explore in more depth the relationship between empathy, coexistence and the use of information and communication technologies. Currently, the use of electronic devices is increasingly present in the daily lives of children and young people, which could be influencing their ability to develop skills.

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