

FEW FEELINGS AND AFFECTS AND EVEN FEWER EMOTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Previous research has established that higher levels of quality in early childhood education and care are linked with better outcomes for children (e.g., Mashburn et al., 2008). For example, children are more likely to exhibit higher levels of social competence in classrooms that offer higher levels of emotional support (e.g., Brock & Curby, 2014). There is also emerging evidence that teachers influence preschoolers' emotional competence, providing experiences that promote or hinder its development (Denham, Bassett, & Zinsler, 2012). However, there is little information on Portuguese teachers' beliefs, priorities, choices, practices, and strategies related to the promotion of emotional development. A growing body of research suggests that children who are more competent in the regulation of emotions also show higher levels of social competence and social acceptance (Kim & Cicchetti, 2010), fewer behavior problems (Cole, Zahn-Waxler, Fox, Usher, & Welsh, 1996), and form better relationships with teachers (Mintz, Hamre, & Hatfield, 2011). Considering the importance of emotions in peer interactions and in further development (e.g., Denham, 1998) the purpose of this paper was **to explore how emotions** (i.e., changes in bodily and mental states that occur in response to environmental or internal triggers; Damásio, 2003), **feelings** (i.e., sensations and interpretations of emotions that have already happened; Damásio, 2003), or **affects** (i.e., states that involve relatively quick good-bad discriminations; Gross & Thompson, 2007) **are currently addressed by Portuguese official standards for preschool education.**

METHOD

► Qualitative research methods:

- Content analysis of the Preschool Education Curriculum Guidelines proposed by the Portuguese Ministry of Education (1997) and the Portuguese legislation on preschool education, identifying and categorizing references to emotions, feelings, or affects.

► Official documents analysed:

- Preschool Education Curriculum Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 1997)
- Framework Law for Preschool Education (Ministry of Education, 1997)
- Preschool teachers' general professional profile (Decree-Law No. 240/2001)
- Preschool teachers' specific professional profile (Decree-Law No. 241/2001)

RESULTS

Figure 1. Frequency of references to emotions, feelings, and affects across Portuguese official standards

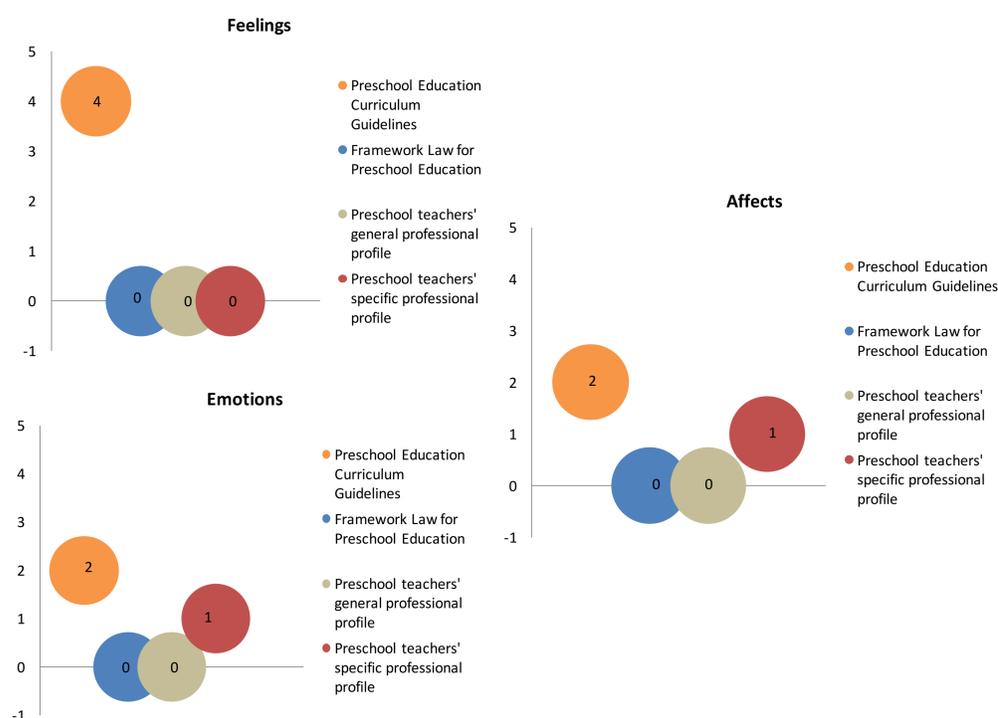


Table 1. Examples of units of meaning derived from content analysis of Portuguese official standards, aiming to identify references to the importance and promotion of emotions, feelings, and affects.

Official standards	Emotions	Feelings	Affects
Preschool Education Curriculum Guidelines	"(...) one of the functions of the writing code is (...) to share feelings and emotions (...)"	"(...) to express and to communicate feelings through gestures or mime (...)"	"(...) to learn to write his/her name, which has an affective meaning for the child (...)"
Preschool teachers' specific professional profile	"Teacher supports and fosters the affective, emotional, and social development of each child and the group."		"Teacher supports and fosters the affective, emotional, and social development of each child and the group."

DISCUSSION

- According to our findings, a residual number of references to emotions, feelings, or affects was found in the official standards for early childhood education and care, in a total of 10 units of meaning. In general, it seems that promotion of emotional development is not particularly valued in the official standards. Furthermore, it is important to note that feelings and affects are more often referred to than emotions. Not excluding the importance of feelings and affects, it is known that emotions help determine the flow and outcome of interaction and they are intimately intertwined with social competence (e.g., Denham et al., 2014).
- These results should contribute to the discussion of how emotional development of children in early childhood education and care may be operationalized and included on Portuguese official standards.