



### **Early-childhood Teachers' Emotion Socialization Practices: A Multi-Method Study**

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## Abstract

We investigated early childhood teachers' emotion socialization practices via a multi-method study that combined self-report measures and structured observational situations at **day care centre**.

Eighty-nine teachers ( $M_{age} = 38.29$  years;  $SD = 11.06$ ) completed two questionnaires about their emotion socialization style and beliefs about emotions, respectively. A subsample of 40 teachers also participated in two experimental situations designed for observing their responses to children's emotional distress. We developed an innovative coding system for classifying teachers' reactions in terms of focus (problem, emotion, solution, time) and style (coaching, dismissing, and amplifying, a new style we detected). All teachers deployed a variety of emotion socialization practices. Coaching reactions (especially emotion-focused) were the most frequent, followed by dismissing (problem- and emotion-focused responses) and, to a lesser extent, amplifying responses (mainly problem-focused). There were significant associations between the self-report scores and the responses observed in the experimental situations. We discuss the educational implications of these findings.

*Keywords:* emotion socialization style; observation; early childhood teachers; emotion socialization practices

## Early-childhood Teachers' Emotion Socialization Practices: A Multi-Method Study

### Introduction

Children begin acquiring socio-emotional competence early in life, passing through a sequence of well-documented developmental milestones (Saarni, 1999). Their social and emotional outcomes also depend on the experience and learning that they receive both in the home and in external educational settings where they come into contact with caregivers other than their parents.

Numerous studies have investigated and described these so-called emotion socialization processes that contribute to shaping children's developmental trajectories (Björk, Havighurst, Pons, & Karevold, 2020; Brophy-Herb, Merckling, Senehi, & Kwon, 2016; Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2015).

First, the contribution of family to the development of children's social-emotional competence has been widely investigated (e.g., Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Thompson & Meyer, 2007). The earliest studies on socio-emotional socialization go back to the start of the 1980s (Lewis & Saarni, 1985), when this construct began to be defined as the more or less intentional strategies used by parents to promote their children's socio-emotional competence, in keeping with the norms of their cultural group. Subsequent studies have showed that children may be socialized to emotions in different ways. For example, they may observe the emotions expressed by others (*modelling*), even when they themselves are not directly involved in an interaction, such as when their parents argue, are worried, and so on. They may also receive a variety of positive and negative responses (e.g., attention, support, interest, disapproval, comfort, etc.) to their own verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotion (*contingency*), and they may even be explicitly instructed (*teaching*) by significant adults about the expression, causes, and regulation of emotions (Denham, 1998; 2007).

More recently, in parallel with investigations of emotional socialization in the family setting, a flourishing area of research has developed around the theme of emotion socialization in out-of-home learning and care contexts. Like parents, teachers play a key role as emotional socializers,

fostering children's development of emotional skills by adopting modelling, contingency, and teaching responses to their emotions (Ciucci, Baroncelli, & Toselli, 2015; Ciucci, Baroncelli, Toselli, & Denham, 2018; Denham, Bassett, & Miller, 2017; Denham, Bassett, & Zinsser, 2012). More specifically, early childhood educators identify and attribute meaning to toddlers' emotions, responding and reacting to them in different ways: for example, by empathizing with, physically comforting or distracting the child, or alternatively, by ignoring, minimizing, or even ridiculing and punishing its emotional displays. They therefore contribute to young children's early emotional development by transmitting key knowledge and strategies enabling toddlers to recognize, understand, and regulate their own and others' emotions (Ahn, 2005; Ahn & Stifter, 2006; Denham, Ferrier, & Bassett, 2020).

### **Emotion Socialization Styles and Beliefs about Emotions**

Studies conducted in the family setting have shown that there are two main parental styles of socializing emotions: *coaching* and *dismissing*, which are both strongly associated with adults' beliefs surrounding emotions (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). Coaching children's emotions implies that caregivers value emotions as positive, are inclined to allow children experience emotions, are aware of both their own and their children's feelings, accept them empathically, and are effective in helping their children to process and regulate emotion (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Dunsmore & Karn, 2001). Conversely, parents who tend to be dismissing of their children's emotions think that emotion is of no value, or even negative and dangerous, wish to protect their children from experiencing strong emotions, and are characterized by a lack of awareness of their own and others' emotions and by poor effectiveness in solving emotional problems, leading them to devalue, minimize, or ignore their children's negative emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Lunkenheimer, Shields, & Cortina, 2007; Shewark & Blandon, 2015).

As stated above, recent research has also focused on out-of-home contexts. This is because a growing number of young children across a variety of cultures are spending a significant proportion of their time in educational settings such as infant-toddler centres and kindergartens. With the

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3 expansion of care for children in contexts other than the home, the key role of teachers in  
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5 facilitating their development has come into greater focus. Similarly to what happens at home,  
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7 teachers' behaviours communicate to children a variety of messages concerning the knowledge,  
8  
9 expression, and regulation of emotions. Although teachers adopt both coaching and dismissing  
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11 emotion socialization styles, they report deploying coaching practices more frequently (Denham et  
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13 al., 2017; Denham et al., 2020).

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17 As with parents, teachers' own beliefs about emotions are related to their emotion  
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19 socialization styles, which in turn can influence children's social and emotional learning (Ahn,  
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21 2005; Hyson & Lee, 1996; Morris, Denham, Bassett, & Curby, 2013; Ornaghi, Agliati, Pepe, &  
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23 Gabola, 2020). Zinsser and colleagues (Zinsser, Shewark, Denham, & Curby, 2014; Zinsser,  
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25 Denham, Curby, & Shewark, 2015) have investigated preschool teachers' emotion socialization  
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27 patterns, exploring the relations between their beliefs about social and emotional learning and the  
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29 emotional support they are observed to give to children. Their findings suggested that highly  
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31 emotionally supportive teachers see social and emotional learning as crucial to children's wellbeing,  
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33 viewing it as a core element of their educational work; conversely, moderately emotionally  
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35 supportive teachers tend to focus on specific emotion skills in the context of structured social  
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37 emotional learning activities, viewing intervention programs as discrete projects rather than as an  
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39 integral part of their routine educational activities.

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44 Ciucci et al. (2015) developed a self-report scale for early childhood teachers aimed at  
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46 assessing their emotion-related beliefs and emotion socialization behaviours (coaching and  
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48 dismissing). They found that coaching styles were associated with awareness and acceptance of  
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50 children's emotions on the part of teachers as well as with greater emotional self-efficacy, both  
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52 professional and personal. In other words, teachers were more likely to adopt a coaching style when  
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54 they felt competent to manage their own and the children's emotions in the day-care setting.  
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56 Conversely, a dismissing style was associated with low awareness of the children's emotions and a  
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58 view of negative emotions as inappropriate or even dangerous.  
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### Measuring Teachers' Emotion Socialization: An Open Question

As the literature just reviewed suggests, previous studies on emotion socialization have categorized teachers' styles as either coaching or dismissing. The most frequently used instruments in the literature are self-report questionnaires that measure both of these styles, with a view to establishing which, if either, dominates the teacher's interactions with children (Ciucci et al., 2015). The limitations of this kind of measure include the risk of bias and subjectivity. Furthermore, the coaching-dismissing dichotomy helps researchers to classify teachers' behaviours as more or less supportive, but, by the same token, may fail to capture the complexity, nuances, and dynamic nature of the emotion socialization process (Ornaghi, Pepe, Agliati, & Grazzani, 2019). Another way to investigate teachers' emotion socialization is to conduct naturalistic observation in non-manipulated contexts. Although this methodology offers rich and multifaceted information about emotion socialization styles, it is extremely expensive in terms of the time and resources required to implement it (e.g., Ahn, 2005). In addition, naturalistic observations of teacher-children interactions in educational contexts may provide data that does not lend itself to comparison with other findings, given the vast number of factors that can vary, including the type of situation observed, number of children involved, materials used, etc.

Hence, in the current study we innovatively set out to collect data on early childhood teachers' emotion socialization via both self-report instruments and structured observational situations in which certain key conditions were controlled (a stressful event, a pair of children where one was advantaged and the other disadvantaged, etc.). We chose to combine these methods with a view to advancing understanding of the complexity of the emotion socialization process. While self-report questionnaires provide information about the dominant style teachers ascribe to themselves, we believe that it is also important to observe the practices they adopt, which are contingent and dependent on specific circumstances. Indeed, independently of what adults present as their leading style, multiple factors (the teacher's individual characteristics, the type of situation, the child's gender or temperament, **the specific emotion the child feels and displays**, etc.) may elicit

a range of coaching or dismissing responses, and variability may even occur within a single interaction (Grady, 2020; King, 2020; Swartz & McElwain, 2012). As far as we know, no previous studies have used a multi-method research design to investigate teachers' emotion socialization styles at **day care centre**.

### **The Current Study**

The core aim of the present study was to advance our understanding of early childhood teachers' emotion socialization practices in educational contexts by both investigating their beliefs about emotions and emotion socialization styles via self-report measures and observing their emotion socialization practices in structured experimental situations at **day care centre**. In order to capture the variability, contingency, and complexity of teachers' responses to children's emotional distress, we developed a new system for coding observations, which was designed to capture what emotion socialization styles the teachers deployed and what aspects they focused on via their behaviours.

First, we expected to find associations between teachers' beliefs about emotions and emotion socialization styles and practices, in keeping with the current literature (Ahn, 2005; Ciucci et al., 2015; Ornaghi et al., 2020; Zinnser et al., 2015; Zinsser at al., 2014). **More specifically, we hypothesized that teachers' self-reported emotion socialization styles would be associated with beliefs about emotions and that both self-reported emotion socialization styles and beliefs about emotions would be associated with the observed behaviours. Second, in relation to the observational data, we predicted that teachers displayed distinct emotion socialization styles – with a predominance of coaching practices (Denham et al., 2017; Denham et al., 2020) – and that they would focus on different aspects of the stressful episode contingently to the specific situation they are experiencing.**

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 89 early childhood teachers, all female, with a mean age of 38.29 years ( $SD = 11.06$ , range: 22-58 years) and between 1 and 41 years' teaching experience ( $M = 14.94$  years;  $SD =$

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11.07). The sample was representative of the target population in Italy. All participants were teachers of typically developing children aged between 2 and 3 years and, in keeping with Italian legislation on early childhood education and care, each had a class of no more than eight children. The teachers were recruited at 49 infant-toddler centres – either private or municipally run – located in urban neighbourhoods in Northern Italy, specifically in the city of Milan and the surrounding metropolitan area. This area is characterized by a high density of population, a high rate of employment, and a strong supply of early childhood education and care services. In Italy, early childhood teachers are almost exclusively women and they generally work with infants and toddlers aged 6 months to 3 years. Children typically attend day care for four to eight hours a day, five days a week. University training (a bachelor's degree in Educational Sciences) has only recently (2017) become a mandatory requirement for early childhood educators. We did not include practitioners working in home-based childcare in our sample because this type of care is still relatively rare in Italy. With regard to the participants' academic backgrounds, 65.9% held a high school diploma, 23.5% a bachelor's degree, 9.4 % a master's degree, and only 1.2% a postgraduate qualification. In addition, 69.9% of the participating teachers reported having previously attended training courses on emotion education themes, while 28.1% stated that they had never received such training.

**Measures and Administration Procedure**

To evaluate the teachers' emotion socialization styles, we administered a validated self-report questionnaire to all participants. A subgroup of randomly selected teachers (N = 40) agreed to also participate in two structured observational situations on-site at day care centre, whose aim was to examine their emotion socialization practices.

*The Crèche Educators Emotional Style Questionnaire* (CEESQ, Ciucci et al., 2015). This instrument is divided into two parts, in each of which respondents are asked to rate a set of items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true) to 5 (completely true). The first section (Children's Emotions, 21 items) assesses the early childhood teachers' emotion socialization style and their self-efficacy as emotion socializers via three subscales: the *Emotion Coaching* style scale (EC;



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seven items, possible range of scores: 5-35; e.g., “Children’s sadness is an emotion worth exploring”), the *Emotion Dismissing* style scale (ED; five items, possible range of scores: 5-25; e.g., “The children will learn to manage their emotions by themselves”) and *Self-Efficacy as Emotion Socializer* scale (SEES; six items, range of possible scores: 5-30; e.g., “I feel able to help children cope with their fears and their anger”). The reliability coefficients for the three subscales were  $\alpha = .75$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ , and  $\alpha = .81$ , respectively, in line with alpha values of the original instrument ( $\alpha = .75$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ , and  $\alpha = .70$ , respectively). The second section (Individual Emotions, 15 items) evaluates teachers’ awareness, acceptance, and regulation of their own emotions via two subscales: *Self-Efficacy* scale (SE, 10 items, possible range of scores: 5-50; e.g., “When my mood changes, I easily recognize my emotions”) and *Denial of Emotion* scale (DE, four items, possible range of scores: 5-20; e.g., “I perceive my negative emotions as something to defend myself against”). The reliability coefficients of these two subscales were  $\alpha = .83$  and  $\alpha = .73$ , respectively, in line with alpha values of the original instrument ( $\alpha = .86$  and  $\alpha = .59$ , respectively).

*Caregivers’ Beliefs About Emotions questionnaire* (CBAE, Hyson & Lee, 1996). This instrument evaluates adults’ beliefs about their role in children’s emotion development at school. It consists of 23 items (of which 11 are reverse-scoring items) describing beliefs and behaviours, which teachers are invited to rate on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The questionnaire assesses different dimensions of teachers’ beliefs via six subscales: *Bonds*, measuring belief in the importance of bonds of affection between the adult and child (four items, possible range of scores: 4-24; e.g., “It’s good to hug and touch children affectionately throughout the day”); *Expressiveness*, measuring the belief that adults should openly express their feelings and emotions (four items, possible range of scores: 4-24; e.g., “It’s good for a teacher to let children know when she is feeling angry”); *Instruction/Modelling*, measuring the belief that adults should model and instruct children in appropriate emotion expression (three items, possible range of scores: 3-18; e.g., “When a child is angry because another child won’t share a toy, I often tell the child exactly what words she could use to express her feelings”); *Talk/Label*,

measuring the belief that it is important to talk about and label feelings (six items, possible range of scores: 6-36; e.g., “I spend a lot of time talking to children about why they feel the way they do”); *Protect*, measuring the belief that children should be protected from distressing emotions (three items, possible range of scores: 3-18; e.g., “Teachers should not read children stories that might make them sad or worried”); and *Display/Control*, measuring belief in children’s ability to display emotions acceptably (6 items, possible range of scores: 6-36; e.g., “As a teacher, it’s important for me to teach children socially acceptable ways of expressing their feelings”). In line with the original 23-item version of the questionnaire (Hyson & Lee, 1996), the reliability analyses for the subscales yielded moderate alpha values ranging from .55 to .72, with an average alpha of .60; interclass correlation value was .65.

*Structured Observational Situations.* Each of the 40 teachers in the subsample took part, on-site at her infant-toddler centre, in two different experimental situations – the “little boxes situation” and the “felt-tip pens situation” – which were developed ad hoc for this study and were presented in counterbalanced order (a detailed description of the two experimental situations is provided in Appendix A). In both situations, each teacher was individually videotaped with a pair of children (aged between 24 and 36 months) randomly chosen by the experimenter from within the class. The experiment was set up with a dyad of children for two reasons. First, our experiment hinged on forcing an inequality between the children, by artificially placing one child in a favourable condition and the other child in an unfavourable one. Second, the situation was designed to be as natural and familiar as possible for the teachers, who habitually spend more time interacting with groups of children than in one-on-one interactions. Each child was only eligible to participate in one situation.

The teachers were blind to the fact that both situations would create inequalities between the children. Furthermore, they were not aware that one box contained a small toy while the other was empty (“little boxes situation”), and that one felt-tip pen worked but the other did not (“Felt-tip pens situation”). The rationale for this was to elicit the teachers’ spontaneous responses to a situation that

children would likely experience as stressful. For the same reason, at the end of the session the teacher was asked not to reveal the dynamics of the experiments to colleagues, and to avoid discussing them with the experimenter, other teachers, or the children, so as to protect the validity of the data.

For both situations, the experimenter invited the teacher and the two children to move to a different room from the regular classroom. The teacher was invited to sit down in front of the children, in a spot where the camera could pick up her facial expressions. Then, the experimenter stated, "Please only use the materials provided. When you think that the situation is over, you can call me, and I will come back to turn off the videorecorder". The experimenter began recording and immediately left the room so as to influence the participants' behaviours as little as possible, returning only when the teacher spontaneously decided to end the experimental session. No time limits were imposed on participants.

At the end of the observational situation, the teacher individually completed the two self-report questionnaires (i.e., CEESQ and CBAE) and placed them in a sealed envelope provided by the experimenter.

### **Coding System for Observations**

A new coding system, based on the existing literature (Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011; Lunkenheimer et al., 2007) and previously established methodology (Ahn & Stifter, 2006), was devised to assess the teachers' emotion socialization practices as videotaped during the two experimental situations (see Appendix B).

Each observed experimental situation (i.e., "little boxes situation" and "felt-tip pen situation") was coded with a view to assessing the teacher's emotion socialization styles (i.e., *coaching, dismissing, amplifying*) and behavioural focus on four key aspects of the situation (i.e., *problem, emotion, solution, and time*). With regard to emotion socialization style, we observed behaviours ascribable to the well-known coaching and dismissing styles, which have been widely investigated in the literature (Ciucci et al., 2015; Zinsser et al., 2015; Zinsser et al., 2014), but also

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3 other behaviours that mainly homed in on, and emphasized, the problem. Specifically, this last  
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5 group of responses entailed insistently highlighting the inequality between the children and  
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7 exacerbating their negative emotions, without allowing any time for a solution to emerge or helping  
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9 the children to find one. We decided to call this style “amplifying”, given that these teachers’  
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11 discomfort in light of the disfavoured child’s negative emotions led them to exacerbate rather than  
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13 decrease the child’s distress.  
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17 With regard to the focus of the teacher’s behaviours in the experimental situation, we coded  
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19 for this as follows: *Problem* (P), when the teacher focused on the difference in the materials  
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21 distributed to the children (i.e., the felt-tip pens, the boxes, the surprise inside the box); *Emotion*  
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23 (E), when the teacher reacted verbally and non-verbally to the children’s emotional responses;  
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25 *Solution* (S), when the teacher focused on how to solve the problematic situation; and *Time* (T),  
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27 **when the teacher calmly allowed the children time to deal with the problematic situation**  
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29 **autonomously or vice versa nervously interrupted their efforts to address the issue.** Importantly,  
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31 neither *Solution* nor *Time* were coded for the amplifying style because, in these cases, the teacher  
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33 typically remained focused on the problem, pressing the children to attend to the issue, without ever  
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35 proposing a solution, or allowing the children to seek one.  
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41 Altogether there were 10 potential coding categories: PC (coaching focused on the  
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43 problem); PA (amplifying focused on the problem); PD (dismissing focused on the problem); EC  
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45 (coaching focused on emotion); EA (amplifying focused on emotion); ED (dismissing focused on  
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47 emotion); SC (coaching focused on solution); SD (dismissing focused on solution); TC (coaching  
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49 focused on time); and TD (dismissing focused on time). These categories were not mutually  
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51 exclusive and so, for a given situation, teachers’ responses could include one or more of these  
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53 categories of behaviour.  
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57 As the recordings were variable in length, ranging from two to 10 minutes, only a pre-  
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59 defined two-minute time frame was observed, so that the duration of naturalistic observation would  
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be equal for all participants. In the “little boxes situation” and “felt-tip pen situation”, the coding

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3 began once one of the children opened the box or removed the lid of the felt-tip pen, respectively.  
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5 The clips were then broken down into 15-second segments (i.e., interval recording; Hobart &  
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7 Frankel, 2014). Next, an ad hoc coding grid was used to conduct event sampling, or the process of  
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9 recording which behaviours occurred during each time interval for each of the situations. To  
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11 maximise coding reliability, three coders independently rated the video clips. Interrater agreement  
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13 was Cohen's  $K = .88$ . In the case of disagreement between the judges, the behaviour in question  
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15 was analysed and discussed until agreement was reached.  
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19 Occurrences of behaviours in each of the "style x focus" categories in the 2-minute intervals  
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21 were summed for the two experimental situations, yielding ten scores per teacher (i.e., PC, PA, PD,  
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23 EC, EA, ED, SC, SD, TC, TD). Each teacher also received three subscores, corresponding to the  
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25 different emotion socialization styles: Coaching (the sum of PC, EC, SC, and TC), Dismissing (the  
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27 sum of PD, ED, SD, and TD), and Amplifying (the sum of PA and EA).  
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## 30 Results

### 31 Descriptive Statistics

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33 Descriptive statistics for the self-report data are presented in Table 1. Occurrences of the behaviours  
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35 observed in the experimental situations are reported in Table 2. Coaching reactions (especially those  
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37 focused on the children's emotions) were those most frequently displayed by the teachers, followed  
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39 by dismissing responses (mainly focused on the problem and on the children's emotions) and, to a  
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41 lesser extent, amplifying conduct (mainly focused on the problem).  
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47 With respect to the emotion socialization practices observed in the two experimental  
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49 situations, we performed an in-depth analysis on the variability in teachers' responses. **As illustrated**  
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51 **in Figure 1, frequencies of behaviours each teacher displayed in the two situations showed that only**  
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53 **19% (15 out of 80 episodes) of them adopted emotion socialization practices of one style only and**  
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55 **in all of these cases this was the coaching style. In 40% of cases (32 out of 80), one style was**  
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57 **observed to be more dominant compared to the others, defined as when the teacher displayed**  
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59 **responses ascribable to a given style at least twice as often as she displayed the other styles (e.g., if**  
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a teacher displayed one coaching-style behaviour and seven behaviours ascribable to the dismissing style). Finally, in the remaining 41% of cases (33 out of 80), teachers used a variety of styles without any one style prevailing over the others (e.g., three dismissing-style responses, four amplifying-style responses and three coaching-style responses).

### **Association between Self-report Scores and Observed Practices**

Inter-correlations among the categories of response observed in the experimental situations provided evidence for internal consistency within each of the three different emotion socialization styles. More specifically, as illustrated in Table 3, significant and positive associations ( $p < .02$ ) were found among coaching reactions with different focuses (problem, emotion, solution). Solution was significantly and negatively correlated with Time ( $p = .005$ ), reflecting the fact that the more the teacher focused on encouraging the children to find a solution to the problem, the less time remained for them to work on the problem by themselves. Dismissing responses focused on the problem were significantly correlated with dismissing responses focused on the solution ( $p = .004$ ) while dismissing responses focused on emotion were significantly correlated with dismissing responses focused on time ( $p < .001$ ). Finally, amplifying reactions centred on the problem were significantly correlated with amplifying reactions focused on emotion ( $p = .01$ ).

Inter-correlations among all study variables are presented in Table 4. Coaching as measured by the CEESQ was positively associated with: self-efficacy as emotion socializers ( $p < .001$ ), Bonds ( $p = .004$ ), Expressivity ( $p = .012$ ) Instruction ( $p = .036$ ), Talk ( $p = .008$ ), and total coaching responses during the structured observational situations ( $p = .001$ ), but negatively correlated with global observed dismissing reactions ( $p = .003$ ). Dismissing as measured by the CEESQ was positively correlated with Denial ( $p = .005$ ) and Protect ( $p = .001$ ), and negatively correlated with Instruction ( $p < .001$ ) and Talk ( $p = .019$ ). Furthermore, teachers' self-efficacy as emotion socializers was significantly correlated with their self-efficacy with regard to their own emotions ( $p < .001$ ) and with their performance on the following dimensions of the CBAE: Bonds ( $p = .008$ ), Instruction ( $p = .010$ ), Talk ( $p = .008$ ), and Display ( $p = .024$ ). Finally, emotional self-efficacy was

positively correlated with performance on the Instruction ( $p = .045$ ) and Display ( $p = .018$ ) dimensions of the CBAE, and negatively correlated with the amplifying responses observed in the experimental situations ( $p = .011$ ).

### Discussion

The overall aim of the current study was to advance our understanding of early childhood teachers' emotion socialization styles by implementing a multi-method research design combining self-report measures and observation. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that has adopted such a methodology to investigate early childhood teachers' beliefs about emotions, emotion socialization styles, and practices at **day care centre**.

We obtained the following main findings. First, there were significant associations between teachers' beliefs about emotions and their self-reported emotion socialization styles. Second, both of these self-report measures were significantly associated with the emotion socialization practices observed in the experimental situations designed for this study. Third, we observed three distinct emotion socialization styles – coaching, dismissing, and amplifying – each characterized by specific practices. Interestingly, most teachers displayed a variety of emotion socialization practices, even within the same situation, with coaching responses the most frequently deployed overall.

#### Associations between Beliefs about Emotions and Emotion Socialization Styles

As expected, teachers' self-reported beliefs about emotions and self-reported emotion socialization styles were correlated with each other. This finding is in line with previous studies showing a strong relationship between teachers' beliefs about emotions and their emotion socialization styles (Ciucci et al., 2015; Ornaghi et al., 2020; Zinsser et al., 2015; Zinsser et al., 2014). Specifically, teachers who believe that emotions deserve to be discussed with children and that adults are key emotion socializers, obtained higher scores on the coaching style scale and lower scores on the dismissing style scale. This finding suggests that a commitment to talking about feelings and awareness that adults have a role to play in educating children about emotions are two beliefs that help teachers to provide supportive and attuned responses. Similarly, teachers who

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3 thought that feelings should be openly expressed and that children need bonds of affection tended to  
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5 obtain higher scores for the coaching style. Interestingly, the teachers who held these “positive”  
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7 beliefs about emotions also perceived themselves as more emotionally competent and better able to  
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9 help children manage their feelings. This outcome is consistent with reports in the literature that  
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11 teachers who are more aware, open, and sensitive towards their own and others' feelings have high  
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13 levels of emotional self-efficacy and self-efficacy as emotion socializers, and this has implications  
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15 for the efforts they make to support their pupils' emotional development (Ciucci et al., 2015;  
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17 Goroshit & Hen, 2014).

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21 Conversely, believing that certain emotions are of no value, that children should be  
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23 protected from experiencing certain feelings, or that some emotions are unacceptable were found to  
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25 be associated with higher scores for the dismissing style. Indeed, the avoidance of given emotions –  
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27 thought to be dangerous or negative for the child who is assumed unable to manage them – is  
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29 indeed likely to result in unsupportive practices such as minimizing, ignoring, or devaluing  
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31 children's feelings, especially the negative ones (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Lunkenheimer et al., 2007).  
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33 Notably, these teachers also obtained higher scores on the emotion denial scale, implying that they  
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35 also perceived their own negative emotions as something to defend themselves against. This result  
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37 is in line with previous studies showing that adults who rely on dismissing practices often lack  
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39 awareness of their own emotions and effective skills for regulating them (Lunkenheimer et al. 2007;  
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41 Ornaghi et al., 2019; Shewark & Blandon, 2015).

#### 42 43 44 45 46 **Associations between Self-Report Measures and Observed Practices**

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48 The teachers' coaching practices as observed in the experimental situations were positively  
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50 associated with their self-perceived coaching style as assessed by the questionnaire. This confirms  
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52 that teachers' actual responses towards children in the stressful situations were consistent with the  
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54 emotion socialization styles they reported deploying. Furthermore, both observed and self-reported  
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56 coaching practices were negatively associated with observed dismissing responses. This is  
57  
58 consistent with the fact that teachers who display a coaching style tend to recognize children's  
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3 feelings and act promptly to support their regulation rather than dismissing them (Morris et al.,  
4  
5 2013; Swartz & McElwain, 2012).  
6

7  
8 Furthermore, the observed amplifying practices were negatively associated with teachers'  
9  
10 emotional self-efficacy and their years of work experience. When teachers responded in this way,  
11  
12 they appeared to be having difficulty managing the stressful situation, and displayed uncertainty in  
13  
14 regulating not only the children's feelings, but also their own. It is plausible that their own  
15  
16 emotional self-efficacy issues may have led teachers to magnify or play down the intensity of the  
17  
18 children's feelings, a pattern that has already been identified in the literature (Saarni, 1999; Swartz  
19  
20 & McElwain, 2012). In addition, teachers with fewer years of work experience deployed more  
21  
22 amplifying practices than teachers with more work experience behind them. It may be that more  
23  
24 experienced teachers possess more advanced knowledge and social-emotional skills enabling them  
25  
26 to deal with multiple stressors and leading them to perceive themselves as more effective in their  
27  
28 work (Goroshit & Hen, 2014). In support of this explanation, most of the participants reported  
29  
30 having previously attended training courses on emotion education themes, suggesting that teachers'  
31  
32 opportunities to develop their own emotional competence and self-efficacy may systematically  
33  
34 increase over time.  
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### 39 **Emotion Socialization Practices in More Depth**

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41  
42 Interestingly, teachers deployed a variety of emotion socialization practices, including within the  
43  
44 same experimental situation. In most cases, their behaviours could be mapped onto the different  
45  
46 emotion socialization styles. Specifically, our results showed that 81% of participants adopted more  
47  
48 than one style, suggesting that early childhood teachers may select their responses contingently to the  
49  
50 specific situation they are experiencing, the emotional context in which the interaction occurs, and  
51  
52 the child's reaction to the situation (i.e., Eisenberg et al, 1998). This is in line with the idea that  
53  
54 emotion socialization during adult-child interactions is a dynamic process (Lougheed, Brinberg, Ram,  
55  
56 & Hollstein, 2020; Lunkenheimer, Hamby, Lobo, Cole, & Olson, 2020; Mirabile, Oertwig, &  
57  
58 Halbertsadt, 2018). Indeed, responses and reactions to children's emotions are not linear or  
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3 straightforward and may change based on the children's behaviours, demands, and needs, as well as  
4  
5 on the specific situation. Given that practices deployed by teachers, and in general by adults, are  
6  
7 closely related to the contingent situation, emotion socialization styles should not be viewed as  
8  
9 permanent categories, but rather as complex patterns which are influenced by multiple individual and  
10  
11 contextual factors and which may thus be shaped and changed.  
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14  
15 Notably, as expected, most of the teachers in our sample drew on coaching practices during  
16  
17 both experimental situations. This is in keeping with previous studies that investigated emotion  
18  
19 socialization styles in Western cultures, finding that coaching is more frequently used than other  
20  
21 emotion socialization styles, such as dismissing (Denham et al., 2017; Denham et al., 2020). The  
22  
23 observational data further demonstrated that most teachers were able to shift their focus from  
24  
25 recognizing the problem (i.e., the inequality between the two children) to finding a solution. We might  
26  
27 infer from this that they thought the children could tolerate a moderate level of frustration without  
28  
29 becoming overwhelmed and that the negative emotions triggered by the problematic situation could  
30  
31 easily be dealt with by seeking alternative strategies. Future studies might usefully investigate in more  
32  
33 depth the variety of solutions that the teachers propose to the children, distinguishing between those  
34  
35 that are autonomy-oriented (e.g., when the teacher gives children time to find a solution) from those  
36  
37 that impede children's initiatives (e.g., the teacher proposes a solution).  
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42  
43 The coding system we developed ad hoc for this study not only allowed us to detect  
44  
45 behaviours that reflected the coaching and dismissing styles, but also to identify a new emotion  
46  
47 socialization style, which we have labelled "amplifying". While coaching and dismissing styles  
48  
49 have previously been investigated in out-of-home settings (e.g., Ciucci et al., 2015; Zinsser et al.  
50  
51 2015; Zinsser et al., 2014), the amplifying style has never been documented in the literature. This  
52  
53 finding may depend on a combination of cultural and individual factors. Indeed, socialization  
54  
55 processes invariably occur within a cultural framework that shapes adult-child relations via cultural  
56  
57 practices and beliefs. As a function of culture, emotional experience may be accepted or devalued,  
58  
59 or specific emotions and certain levels of emotional arousal may be valued more than others  
60

## EARLY-CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' EMOTION SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES

19

(Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011; Friedlmeier, Corapci, & Cole, 2011). For instance, with regard to the Italian cultural context, teachers typically adopt supportive emotion socialization responses towards children's emotions and usually welcome the expression of both positive and negative emotion. However, individual differences in emotional self-efficacy can undermine the ability to regulate another's arousal and distress, contributing on the contrary to increasing the intensity of such feelings (Goroshit & Hen, 2014; Saarni, 1999; Swartz & McElwain, 2012).

The observational data further showed that each emotion socialization style was associated with distinct and specific practices defined by the focus of the teacher's behaviour. In particular, practices characterized by a coaching style were mainly emotion-focused. As mentioned earlier, Italian teachers typically deploy supportive emotion socialization behaviours, whereby they attune themselves to the child's feelings and display empathy. This emotionally sensitive approach is intended to guide children towards understanding and knowing how to regulate their own and others' emotions (Denham et al., 2015). Stressful situations are frequently experienced in the course of everyday routines at infant-toddler centres and teachers typically adopt emotion-based strategies to resolve conflicts between children. Hence, it was to be expected that in problematic situations such as those devised for the purposes of the present study – in which some children found themselves in comparatively unfavourable circumstance, leading them to experience negative emotions – most teachers would be inclined to focus on recognizing such emotions and helping the children to manage the stressful situation. In keeping with this prediction, they were observed to display empathy with the children's feelings, label the children's internal states, or encourage the children to express their emotions. Such a finding is also consistent with a Western, individualistic cultural framework that emphasizes the importance of knowing one's own feelings and differentiating among emotions. In a cultural context like this, caregivers may provide a great deal of emotion-related guidance, including affective matching, naming feelings, and appropriate responses to perceived feelings (Keller et al., 2005; Keller & Otto, 2009).

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2  
3 The fact that dismissing-style practices were often emotion-focused is not contradictory. It  
4 implies that sometimes the teachers ignored the children's emotions or displayed no emotional  
5 attunement. Although Italian teachers are culturally primed to be emotionally sensitive, contextual  
6 cues suggesting what children can or should feel may inform contingent reactions to emotional  
7 displays (Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011), resulting in this kind of response. Similarly, dismissing  
8 responses by teachers were often observed to be problem focused, in terms of denying the problem  
9 or asking the unfairly treated child to accept the inequality. This strategy is consistent with the  
10 belief that children should be protected from experiencing negative emotions. Indeed, the existing  
11 literature indicates that such a view may be more frequently associated with unsupportive and  
12 avoidant responses to children's emotion displays, which in turn, as has been widely demonstrated  
13 in studies with parents, is associated with a lesser inclination to speak to or converse with children  
14 about emotions (Denham et al., 2015; Hyson & Lee, 1996; Ornaghi et. al., 2020; Zinsser et al.,  
15 2014).

16  
17 We further found that practices which had the effect of amplifying emotions were also  
18 mostly problem focused. Specifically, the teacher would insistently emphasize the problem and the  
19 inequality between the children, repeatedly pointing out that the unfavourably treated child had not  
20 got a working felt-tip pen or a toy inside their box. Now, in individualistic cultures, such as the  
21 Italian one, toys can be used to distract children in emotionally arousing situations (Halberstadt &  
22 Lozada, 2011), by-passing the need for emotion-based strategies. Furthermore, Italian culture views  
23 children in terms of the psychological benefit they provide to their parents (e.g., Keller, 2003), in  
24 other words as a blessing, hence adults' relationships with children are characterized by devotion  
25 and admiration. Within this framework, adults strive to avoid causing frustration to children or to  
26 compensate for it with gifts (Bornstein et al. 2008). However, in our structured observational  
27 situations, teachers were not allowed to offer other materials or objects as they would usually do in  
28 the infant-toddler centre setting. Instead, they were obliged to manage the problematic situation by  
29 using only the materials available to them and by deploying their emotional regulation skills and  
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3 strategies. This may have provoked anxiety and stress in some early childhood teachers, who  
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5 reacted by amplifying the problem rather than helping the child to deal with the stressful situation.  
6

7  
8 Coding the amplifying style assists us in progressing beyond a dichotomous distinction  
9  
10 between coaching and dismissing. These styles should not be viewed as antithetical to one another,  
11  
12 the extremes of a continuum ranging from “good” to “bad”, but rather as distinct dynamic patterns  
13  
14 influenced by multiple factors (Ciucci et al., 2015; Ornaghi et al., 2020). The addition of the  
15  
16 amplifying style may be interpreted as an attempt to build up a more complex and nuanced picture of  
17  
18 teachers' emotion socialization practices, at least in the Italian cultural context. Cross-cultural  
19  
20 research will be required to clarify whether this emotion socialization style is also observed in  
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22 teachers from other countries.  
23  
24

### 25 26 **Limitations and Future Directions**

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28 Naturally, the present study is not without its shortcomings. First, we analysed the behaviours of the  
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30 teachers without taking the children's reactions and characteristics into account. Hence, to further  
31  
32 advance our understanding of the complex phenomenon of emotion socialization, future research  
33  
34 should also relate teachers' responses to how children react and interact with one other in a stressful  
35  
36 situation. For instance, the specific emotion the children feel and the way they display their  
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38 emotion, as well as children's age and gender (i.e., Morris et al. 2013), may elicit different adults'  
39  
40 responses. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study and the limited number of teachers  
41  
42 available to be observed did not allow us to perform sophisticated statistical analyses, aimed for  
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44 example at investigating the associations between variables in terms of cause and effect.  
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49 Despite these limitations, to our knowledge this is the first study in which a multi-method  
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51 approach has been adopted to investigate emotion socialization at day care centre. Despite the  
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53 exploratory nature of the study, we believe it to represent a step forward in increasing our  
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55 knowledge and understanding of the emotion socialization process in an out-of-home context such  
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57 as the childcare centre. Furthermore, we regard the experimental situations and observational grid  
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59 developed for this study as useful tools for ongoing investigation of the contingent and multifaceted  
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3 nature of emotion socialization practices. Our observations identified patterns of behaviour that  
4  
5 were in line with the emotion socialization styles self-reported by the teachers, yet captured a wide  
6  
7 variety of practices, both within and across participants and situations. In sum, observation provides  
8  
9 greater access to the complexity and multiple facets of the emotion socialization process, offering  
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11 insights into the contingent nature of teachers' responses that cannot be gleaned from a self-report  
12  
13 questionnaire alone.  
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### 16 17 **Educational Implications**

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19 Despite the limitations outlined above, the current study bears interesting educational implications.  
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21 Each of the two experimental situations challenged early childhood teachers by requiring them to  
22  
23 manage their own and children's emotions over a stressful two-minute interval. This method might  
24  
25 be applied to training and supervising teachers in their work, with a view to getting them to reflect  
26  
27 on the nature and effectiveness of their behaviours and the consequent impact on children's social-  
28  
29 emotional development.  
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32  
33 Finally, our findings suggest that early childhood teachers' emotion socialization practices  
34  
35 are associated with their emotional self-efficacy and self-efficacy as emotion socializers, as well as  
36  
37 with their beliefs about feelings. Helping teachers to recognize the reasons for their behaviours and  
38  
39 fostering their own emotional competence represent first key steps towards making them feel more  
40  
41 effective (e.g., Denham et al., 2012) and changing their representations surrounding emotions. This  
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43 in turn should make them increasingly more skilled at offering supportive and attuned responses to  
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45 children's emotions.  
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APPENDIX A

Two structured observational situations were designed ad hoc to investigate early childhood teachers' emotion socialization practices. Both the situations caused inequalities between children so that one child would experience stress. In the "little boxes situation", one child receives a box containing a small toy and the other child receives an empty box. In the "felt-tip pens situation", one child receives a felt-tip-pen that worked while the other child receives a felt-tip-pen that had run out of ink.

Situations	Participants	Materials	General instructions
Little boxes situation 	A teacher and two children (randomly chosen from the class by the experimenter)	Two identical little boxes and one small toy to be placed into one box	The teacher is unaware of the boxes' content. She is asked to randomly give one box to each child.  The teacher receives instructions on how to initiate the situation: <i>"Here's a surprise for you: two boxes. What's inside? This is for you and this is for you"</i>
Felt-tip pens situation 	A teacher and two children (randomly chosen from the class by the experimenter; different from those involved in the other situation)	Two white sheets, one working felt-tip-pen and one dried-out felt-tip-pen	The teacher is unaware of the status of the felt-tip pens. She is asked to randomly give one felt-tip pen to each child.  The teacher receives instructions on how to initiate the situation: <i>"Let's do a drawing. I'll give one felt-tip pen to you and another one to you. Who would you like to do your drawings for?"</i>

**APPENDIX B**  
**Coding system for the observed teachers' emotion socialization practices**

	<b>Coaching style (C)</b>	<b>Amplifying style (A)</b>	<b>Dismissing style (D)</b>
<b>P</b> <b>(Problem)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking stock of and clarifying the situation, through questions (e.g., "What's inside? / Is it empty?", "Doesn't it work?") or statements (e.g., "It's empty", "It doesn't work")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stressing the problem to an unnecessary extent (e.g., "It's really and truly empty", "See, it doesn't work")</li> <li>Insistently referring to the difference between the children (e.g., "See, he didn't find any toy inside", "Would you like to have found something inside too?", "Look, her felt-tip pen doesn't work")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inviting the children to verify the problem (e.g., "Let's find the toy", "Check again", "Try drawing again").</li> <li>Denying the problem (e.g., saying "Look!", even if there is nothing in the box; "Nice/Well done!" even if the felt-tip pen is not working)</li> <li>Highlighting the inequality between the children (e.g., "This is yours, stop!")</li> </ul>
<b>E</b> <b>(Emotion)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouraging emotion labelling (e.g., "Do you feel sad?")</li> <li>Encouraging expression of internal states (e.g., "How do you feel?", "What do you think?")</li> <li>Displaying emotional attunement / empathy non-verbally (e.g., the educator smiles at the smiling child/displays sadness towards the sad child)</li> <li>Demonstrating empathy verbally (e.g., "I'm sorry it's empty", "It's a pity it's not working")</li> <li>Encouraging taking the other child's perspective (e.g., "Look, he feels disappointed")</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amplifying the emotion felt by the disfavoured child (e.g., "You're disappointed!")</li> <li>Insisting for internal states' expressed (e.g., "How do you feel?", "What are you thinking?", "You're so sad, right?")</li> <li>Stressing/exaggerating the child's emotional expression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting angry about the child's negative emotions (e.g., "Stop crying!")</li> <li>Displaying poor emotional attunement, by playing down the unfortunate child's emotions (e.g., "You're making a big fuss over nothing, it's no big deal!"; smiling at the child's displeasure) or transmitting anxiety to the fortunate child</li> <li>Ignoring emotions non-verbally (e.g., avoiding a child's gaze)</li> <li>Ignoring emotions verbally (e.g., by not replying to the child)</li> </ul>
<b>S</b> <b>(Solution)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggesting different perspectives/light-hearted solutions (e.g., "You can play opening and closing your box", "Maybe it's a magic pen")</li> <li>Encouraging sharing (e.g., "Would you like to lend her your felt-tip-pen?", "She can show/lend it to you")</li> <li>Asking how to solve the situation (e.g., "What could we do?")</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looking for the researcher (e.g., to report that one of the felt-tip pens isn't working)</li> <li>Imposing a solution in an authoritarian manner (e.g., passing the working felt-tip pen to the unlucky child)</li> </ul>
<b>T</b> <b>(Time)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowing some autonomy (observing/listening without speaking or acting for over five seconds)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abruptly interrupting the session (e.g., "Have you finished? Let's go!")</li> <li>Remaining passive (no speaking or acting, even if the child seeks interaction)</li> </ul>

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## BELIEFS, EMOTION SOCIALIZATION AND MIND-MINDEDNESS

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for self-report measures on teachers' beliefs about emotions and emotion socializations styles ( $N = 89$ )

	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis
<i>CEESQ</i>					
Coaching	27.40	3.98	17-35	-.069	-.323
Dismissing	11.14	3.49	5-18	.347	-.694
Self-efficacy as ES	19.61	2.78	13-26	.288	-.217
Emotional self-efficacy	34.80	5.06	24-46	.317	-.499
Denial of Emotion	7.36	2.18	3-13	.073	-.572
<i>CBEQ</i>					
Bonds	20.55	3.07	9-24	-.859	.983
Expressivity	16.18	3.71	6-24	-.121	-.179
Instruction	14.38	2.70	8-18	-.460	-.492
Talk	26.76	4.62	16-36	.014	-.643
Protect	7.48	3.08	3-18	.680	-.387
Display	14.70	2.48	9-18	-.435	-.553

## BELIEFS, EMOTION SOCIALIZATION AND MIND-MINDEDNESS

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for structured observation of teachers' emotion socialization practices ( $N = 40$ )

	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Range
Problem Coaching (PC)	3.05	1.64	0-7
Problem Amplifying (PA)	1.95	2.31	0-7
Problem Dismissing (PD)	1.40	1.39	0-4
Emotion Coaching (EC)	4.45	3.82	0-8
Emotion Amplifying (EA)	0.47	0.96	0-4
Emotion Dismissing (ED)	1.17	1.78	0-8
Solution Coaching (SC)	3.42	2.81	0-11
Solution Dismissing (SD)	0.97	1.48	0-6
Time Coaching (TC)	1.45	1.83	0-7
Time Dismissing (TD)	1.27	2.50	0-13
Coaching Total Score	12.37	6.23	1-26
Amplifying Total Score	2.42	2.82	0-8
Dismissing Total Score	4.82	4.16	0-21



## BELIEFS, EMOTION SOCIALIZATION AND MIND-MINDEDNESS

Table 3

Intercorrelations among the observational categories

	PC	PA	PD	EC	EA	ED	SC	SD	TC	TD
PC	-	-.100	-.188	.355*	-.064	-.256	.415**	-.210	-.109	-.433**
PA		-	.262	-.244	.393*	-.191	.015	.022	-.194	-.077
PD			-	-.290	.123	-.174	.223	.442**	-.262	-.128
EC				-	-.032	.218	.227	-.266	.149	-.222
EA					-	-.020	.018	.081	-.008	-.066
ED						-	-.342*	-.047	-.119	.547**
SC							-	-.207	-.434**	-.363*
SD								-	-.166	-.130
TC									-	-.033
TD										-

Note: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

BELIEFS, EMOTION SOCIALIZATION AND MIND-MINDEDNESS

Table 4

Intercorrelations among all the study variables

	Age	Work experience	Coaching	Dismissign	Self-efficacy as ES	Emotional Self-efficacy	Denial emotion	Bonds	Expressivity	Instruction	Talk	Protect	Display	C-Tot	A-Tot	D-Tot
Age	-	.892***	-.036	.119	-.023	.093	.024	.103	-.042	-.136	-.070	.017	-.190	.163	-.308	-.085
Work experience		-	.010	.196	.032	.164	.020	.122	-.102	-.143	-.053	.089	-.157	.212	-.469**	-.012
Coaching			-	.051	.449***	.109	-.069	.309**	.272*	.228*	.287**	-.156	.130	.494**	-.161	-.454**
Dismissing				-	.096	-.057	.298**	.141	-.097	-.401***	-.252*	.348**	-.057	.038	.132	.048
Self-efficacy as ES					-	.457**	-.083	.281**	.094	.271*	.279**	.043	.239*	.210	-.115	-.163
Emotional self-efficacy						-	-.256*	.144	-.069	.216*	.162	.066	.252*	.008	-.402*	.088
Denial of Emotion							-	-.111	-.070	-.084	-.030	.161	-.007	.011	.101	-.091
Bonds								-	.319**	.100	.339**	.105	.109	-.048	.073	-.106
Expressivity									-	.178	.343**	-.195	-.023	.224	.306	-.215
Instruction										-	.387**	-.199	.252*	.431**	.015	-.227
Talk											-	-.198	.393**	.232	.030	-.369*
Protect												-	-.094	-.114	-.031	.204
Display													-	-.002	-.107	.050
C-Tot														-	-.196	-.505**
A-Tot															-	--.020
D-Tot																-

Note: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

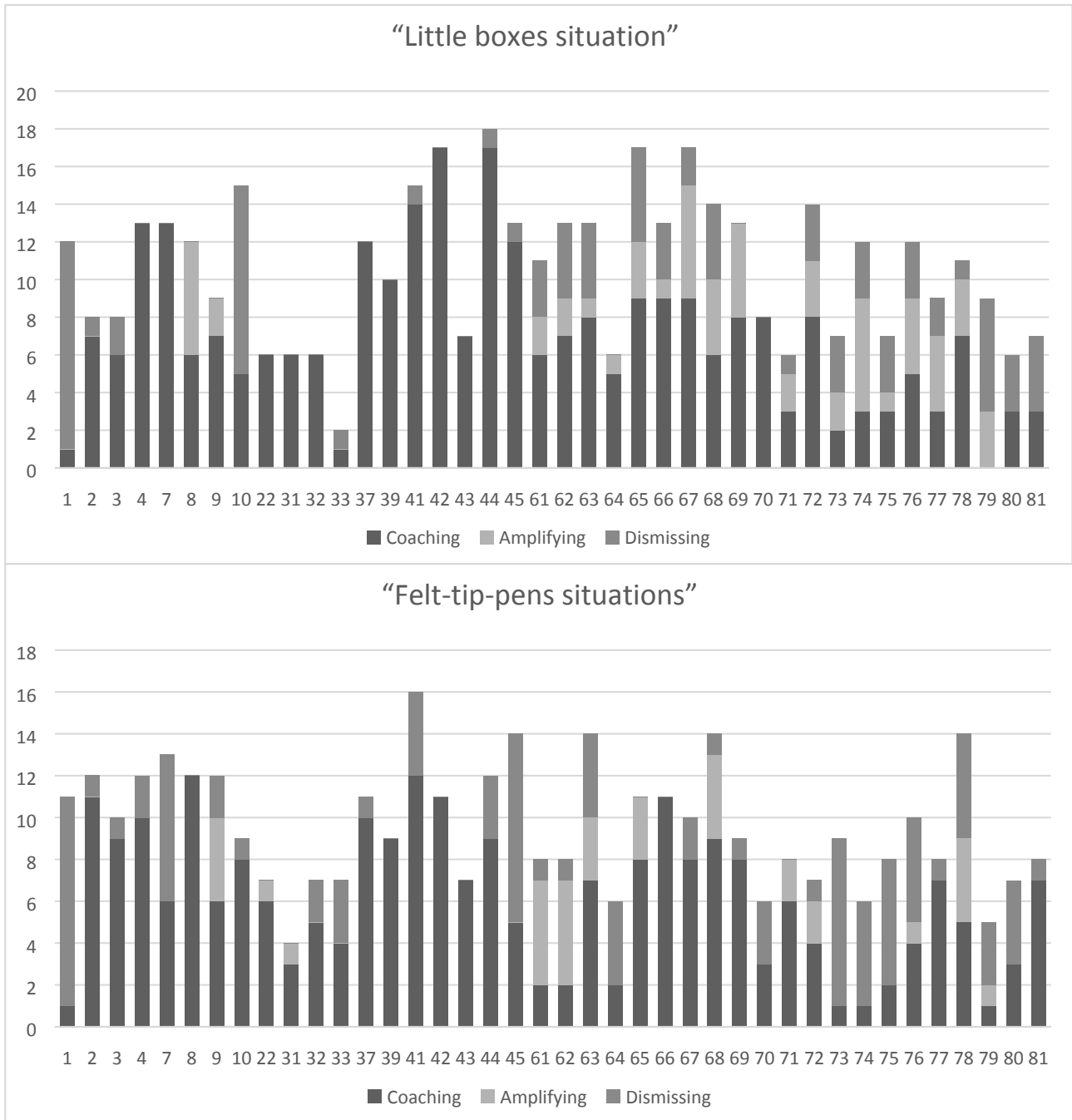


Figure 1 – Frequency of coaching, amplifying and dismissing responses each participant performed within the “Little boxes situation” and the “Felt-tip-pens situation”, respectively.