

EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION AS A STRATEGY TO OPTIMIZE ATTENTION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MEXICO

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61273/neyart.v3i3.184>

| Received: 01/16/2026 | Accepted: 03/14/2026 | Published: 04/17/2026

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Abstract-- The overall objective of this research study is to synthesize the theoretical evidence regarding the relationship between emotional self-regulation and attention span in elementary school students, using a qualitative methodology, in order to inform emotional support strategies that improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

In primary education in Mexico, one of the most significant challenges is not only the teaching of content but also the management of emotions that enable information processing and the achievement of selective attention for learning. Traditionally, it has been thought that learning is the result of the instruction provided by the teacher; however, the reality in elementary school classrooms reveals that students struggle to maintain focused attention due to emotional factors such as difficulties in avoiding distractions and attending to schoolwork; as a result, a lack of emotional self-regulation is observed, and attention is lost during school activities.

There is a knowledge gap where the lack of emotional self-regulation blocks selective attention, leading to frustration and demotivation. Therefore, this literature review seeks to analyze and substantiate how socio-emotional well-being and the understanding of emotions directly influence students' attention span and academic performance; it also proposes a series of pedagogical strategies to link emotional self-regulation with attention processes and the improvement of students' academic performance.

Keywords-- Attention, emotional self-regulation, emotional education, motivation, , academic performance.

Abstract-- The overall objective of this research is to synthesize the theoretical evidence regarding the relationship between emotional self-regulation and attention span in elementary school students. Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to lay the groundwork for emotional support strategies that enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.

In Mexico's basic education system, one of the most significant challenges is not merely the instruction of content, but also the management of emotions that facilitate information processing and the achievement of selective attention for learning. Traditionally, learning has been viewed as the direct result of a teacher's instruction; however, the reality of primary school classrooms reveals that students struggle to maintain focused attention due to emotional factors, such as difficulties in avoiding distractions and engaging with school tasks. Consequently, a lack of emotional self-regulation is observed, leading to a loss of focus during academic activities.

There is a knowledge gap regarding how the absence of emotional self-regulation impedes selective attention, resulting in frustration and demotivation. Therefore, this documentary research seeks to analyze and substantiate how socio-emotional well-being and the understanding of emotions directly influence students' attention spans and academic achievement. Furthermore, this study proposes a series of pedagogical strategies to link emotional self-regulation with attentional processes and the improvement of students' academic performance.

Keywords-- Attention, emotional self-regulation, emotional education, motivation, interpersonal relationships, academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

The field of education is undergoing a shift in how the teaching-learning process is understood. Historically, education has focused on cognitive development, often downplaying the impact of emotions on students' academic performance. In teaching practice in Mexico, the failure to direct students' attention toward their learning processes stems from their lack of interest or from their cognitive processes, leaving aside the students' emotional state.

According to educational psychology and neuroeducation, emotions play a crucial role in motivation, memory, attention, and learning success.

The study of emotions within the educational context has evolved; it is now recognized that the emotional environment in which students interact with instructional content influences their ability to learn and develop holistically. Therefore, this research seeks, through emotion regulation, to build healthy relationships to improve

learning, and proposes a series of actions aimed at practicing emotional self-regulation to improve students' attention during their learning processes.

Rationale

In teaching practice in Mexico's basic education system, particularly at the elementary level, it is frequently observed that the design of educational materials and instructional planning prove insufficient if the student's emotional state is not taken into account. Therefore, this literature review seeks to help teachers understand how emotional self-regulation influences learning processes and affects the attention students demonstrate in class.

Social-emotional well-being is essential for both students and teachers in the classroom; a lack of understanding of how to manage emotions and practice emotional self-regulation can hinder student learning. Through effective emotional management, both individually and in groups, healthy interpersonal relationships are fostered, which in turn facilitates a more cooperative and positive learning environment. This article highlights the need for teachers and students to recognize and address the emotional dimension to maximize the potential for learning and holistic development in education.

The methodology of this literature review is qualitative, as the theoretical sources were drawn from repositories of educational research articles published in indexed journals within the last five years; Based on a theoretical analysis of the background literature and theories addressing emotions, emotional self-regulation, and the attention required in teaching processes, this study presents strategies that promote emotional self-regulation in students and impact their attention processes in class.

DEVELOPMENT

This article analyzes how emotional self-regulation in learning processes significantly influences the selective attention students exhibit while in class. The study of emotions within the educational context has evolved, revealing that the emotional environment in which students interact with academic content directly influences their ability to learn and develop holistically.

According to the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, n.d.), emotions are defined as intense and fleeting mood changes—pleasant or painful—accompanied by a certain somatic agitation

, which highlights the temporary yet profound nature of emotions. American psychologist Daniel Goleman (1995) explains that emotions are complex responses involving both biological and psychological aspects, triggered by different types of situations and generating impulses toward action.

Emotions are natural responses to internal or external situations that significantly impact people's mental and physical states. Psychologically, emotions are not only associated with momentary moods but also have a direct influence on decision-making, perception, and problem-solving ability. In classrooms, emotions manifest through students' behaviors and are directly related to the attention they give to their schoolwork.

Emotions are not merely involuntary reactions; rather, they are complex processes that involve both biological and psychological dimensions. In an educational setting, they can influence students' learning strategies. According to psychologists Richard J. Gerrig and Philip G. Zimbardo (2005), while emotions are short-lived and intense, feelings and moods are less intense but longer lasting. This distinction is important in the educational setting: intense emotions can temporarily impair students' ability to concentrate and their performance, while prolonged moods can influence their long-term willingness to learn.

According to Spanish psychiatrist Marian Rojas Estape (2024), "An emotion is a feeling that affects the body, generating joy, sadness, rage, anger, laziness, and disgust within it. A person can handle an emotion in three different ways. For example: if someone tells me my scarf is ugly, I can respond by saying that they are the ugly one; the second is to believe the comment and let it make me sad; the third is to say that I like it, that I think it's pretty, and that everyone has different tastes. Each of these responses triggers a different emotional, physical, and physiological reaction in the body: the first leaves me without friends; the second makes me sick, raises cortisol levels, and manifests as illness or withdrawn behavior; and the third is the healthy approach—trying to receive stimuli in a healthy way without it harming me."

Various studies have shown that emotions have a profound impact on academic performance and the quality of teacher-student relationships. To understand the

To understand the current state of emotional self-regulation, it is important to examine its historical development and explore some fundamental theoretical elements in this field of study. Andrade González (2022), a researcher at the Higher Institute of Educational Sciences of the State of Mexico, notes that interest in emotions in Mexican schools has been sporadic. Since the 20th century, various reforms have attempted, without sustained success, to integrate the development of students' personality and emotionality. In curricula and study programs prior to 2020, advances in emotional self-regulation were isolated and poorly systematized; the emotional state of students and teachers was overlooked. Today, the New Mexican School, through its curriculum and programs in basic education, posits emotional education as a cross-cutting theme in project-based approaches and in the methodology for applying curriculum content and expected learning outcomes linked to the core themes.

In this regard, according to American educational researcher Barry Zimmerman, emotional self-regulation is a "process consisting of self-generated thoughts, emotions, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to achieve personal goals" (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14). The author notes that students use learning strategies to achieve their goals, which are influenced by the personal goals they have set for themselves. When students are clear about what is expected of them and maintain a regulated emotional state, their attention spans are longer and they achieve their goals.

Emotional self-regulation in elementary school students is necessary to improve learning processes; "self-regulation is not a mental capacity or an academic skill; it is the self-directed process through which students transform their mental capacities into academic skills. This process is cyclical because the pre-performance phases (such as planning and goal-setting) lay the groundwork for the execution processes, which, in turn, influence self-reflection and subsequent reactions. Therefore, self-regulation implies that the student is an active participant in their own learning from a metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral perspective" (Zimmerman, 2000, as cited in Panadero and Alonso-Tapia, 2014, p. 452).

From this perspective, the student is a participant in their own learning; self-reflection on their own academic performance and goal-setting are the factors that direct their attention toward the

Learning and the instructions that guide students' cognitive processes, emotional self-regulation is not an academic skill or a mental ability; rather, it is a cyclical process that can be observed in students' academic performance in the classroom as they engage with their learning through the motivation and behavior they exhibit in their schoolwork.

The study of self-regulation has evolved from the emotional to the pedagogical; early studies of self-regulation focused on the need to emotionally regulate students. Therefore, "Emotional education is a continuous and lifelong educational process that aims to foster the development of emotional competencies as an essential element of human development, with the goal of preparing individuals for life and enhancing personal and social well-being." To this end, emotional education must begin in the early years of life, during early childhood education, and be present throughout the entire schooling period, involving both families and teachers in this task of holistic education" (López Cassá, 2005, p. 155).

In this regard, Elia López Cassá, who holds a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Barcelona, notes that emotional education is an ongoing process that must be integrated into the early childhood and elementary school curriculum to foster children's holistic development. According to her, it is essential that children learn to identify and regulate their emotions with the support of educational plans and programs; she considers it fundamental that, from the earliest years of basic education in Mexico, children learn to name their emotions and how to self-regulate them in order to achieve better levels of concentration in school.

For his part, Costa Rican mathematics professor José Ángel García Retana (2012) notes: "Within the educational process, there has been a tendency to prioritize cognitive aspects over emotional ones. However, learning is an intrinsically affective process. Emotions influence reasoning ability, memory, decision-making, and attitude toward study. A student who fails to manage their frustration when faced with a difficult task will find their attention span blocked, which will prevent the learning process from taking root in a meaningful way" (p. 4).

Based on these ideas, it follows that learning is not a purely rational process, but is also influenced by the emotions of the individuals involved in the learning process. From this perspective, learning begins to be viewed in a holistic way, highlighting the role played by subjectivity and emotions in learning. This author's research emphasized that the student's emotional state acts

as a filter: if there is dysregulation (stress, anxiety, or frustration), selective attention is blocked, preventing the acquisition of new knowledge.

A comparison of the ideas presented by the authors cited in the literature review—Zimmerman (2000) and García Retana (2012)—reveals that emotional self-regulation in elementary school students is a significant factor in the learning process; the theory highlights the importance of the emotional component in the learner's cognitive abilities. Human beings are holistic, and the cognitive and emotional spheres intertwine and form the basis of the individual's holistic development. Emotions play an important role in teaching processes; learning to self-regulate is key to academic success.

With advances in neuropsychology, the study of emotional self-regulation has become more technical. Colombian psychologists Sergio Ribero Marulanda and Lina Agudelo Colorado (2016) defined self-regulation as a high-order executive function that allows the individual to adjust their behavior and attention to achieve goals. For these psychologists, self-regulation is a means of shaping behavior, achieving goals, and focusing on what is important while setting aside what is not. A significant advance was made in self-regulation research, examining how adjusting behavior can help achieve goals and how this behavior can affect the attainment of objectives.

Here, the role of the teacher takes on particular importance. According to Mexican researcher, educator, and scholar Dr. Martha Leticia Gaeta González (2014), the teacher is a key agent in this process. Her findings indicated that self-regulation does not arise spontaneously but requires an “external regulator” (the teacher) to provide the necessary scaffolding for the student to learn how to focus. Serving as the external regulator who teaches students to regulate themselves and focus on their learning goals and objectives is one of the tasks teachers must perform in the classroom.

For her part, Colombian researcher María Isabel Pinzón Navarro argues that "educational practices that promote self-regulation are not limited to the transmission of content, but rather involve creating learning environments where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for improvement rather than as failures. In this sense, teacher scaffolding is essential for elementary students to transition from external regulation, mediated by the teacher, to autonomous self-regulation. Strategies that promote constant monitoring and self-assessment allow the

student to maintain sustained attention, adjusting their efforts according to the demands of the task" (Pinzón Navarro et al., 2024, p. 315).

According to researcher Pinzo Navarro, the teacher's role is to create learning environments that foster improvement by regulating students' emotions; constant monitoring and self-assessment by students are the means by which attention is focused on the requirements of the task at hand. It is also essential that the paradigm regarding student errors shift from viewing them as failures to seeing them as areas of opportunity and improvement; the role of the teacher as a regulator of learning processes and student emotions is necessary in the educational practice proposed in this research article.

Another modern reference in this research is the work of Ernesto Panadero and Jesús Alonso Tapia (2014). They reviewed and disseminated Zimmerman's (2000) model, which proposes that self-regulation occurs in a three-phase cycle:

Anticipation Phase: Where the student analyzes the task and sets goals.

Execution Phase: Where selective attention and self-control are engaged. Self-

Reflection Phase: Where the student evaluates their success and adjusts their strategy.

The following describes each of Zimmerman's (2000) stages: the anticipation stage is the stage in which the student makes a subjective assessment of the instruction or task to be performed and determines the process to follow based on the selected guidelines or procedures. The execution stage involves the action or implementation and the process of selective attention to achieve directed and voluntary control toward the goal. In the self-reflection stage, the student evaluates their success or whether they need to adjust their actions. Zimmerman proposed that it is during the execution phase that the student may lose focus due to external or internal factors that lead to a lack of self-control.

The theory of emotional education (López Cassá, 2005) states that self-regulation stems from emotional stability; emotions must be managed to avoid conflicts, and if a child is emotionally well, they will be able to learn. Meanwhile, the self-regulated learning approach (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2014) defines self-regulation as being conditioned by three cyclical phases: anticipation, execution, and self-reflection. Therefore, if a student fails to recognize their frustration when faced with a math problem, their performance phase will be interrupted by an emotional block, preventing the selective attention needed to solve it.

In this research, both approaches are complementary; one cannot ask a student to self-regulate if they do not first recognize their emotions in order to subsequently assess or evaluate their behavior. Finally, authors Alba del Carmen Valenzuela Santoyo and Samuel Alejandro Portillo Peñuelas (2018) applied these theories to the Mexican context, confirming that emotional intelligence directly correlates with academic performance in elementary school, laying the groundwork for current interventions that aim to improve attention through self-regulation.

One of the most current theories regarding emotional self-regulation is one that incorporates techniques for improving attention. Chilean researchers Nicol Andrea González Cortez and Nelly Gromiria Lagos San Martín (2022) demonstrate that mindfulness-based programs have a measurable effect on the self-regulation of selective attention. These authors assert that "attention is not a static behavior, but a trainable skill. Mindfulness, as an intervention strategy, allows elementary school students to develop greater awareness of their internal states, thereby achieving better self-regulation of selective attention. By reducing the interference of distracting stimuli and anxiety, the child is able to focus their cognitive resources on the present task, optimizing their overall performance" (p. 135).

Based on these theoretical contributions, it follows that attention can be trained; through effective and controlled breathing techniques, students can regulate their emotional state and self-regulate to achieve calm and control over their attention during their learning processes. In primary education in Mexico, according to current curricula, social-emotional learning plays a pivotal role in student learning; mindfulness techniques aimed at emotional self-regulation serve as the bridge between emotions and learning.

It is worth noting in this section that a review of the literature on the importance of formalizing the teaching of emotional self-regulation found that "teaching self-regulation in elementary school should not be limited to the transmission of isolated techniques, but rather requires integration into the classroom culture. This implies that teachers should not only explicitly teach planning or monitoring strategies but also create opportunities for reflection where students can evaluate their own learning process. When students understand the purpose of tasks and have tools to manage their distractions, they develop greater autonomy, which

directly impacts their ability to maintain selective and sustained attention during academic activities" (Ronqui et al., 2021, p. 7).

For this reason, the teaching of self-regulation in elementary education should not be considered an incidental supplement to the curriculum, but rather a subject of explicit and systematic instruction. Working with and through students' emotional self-regulation in elementary school is fundamental to achieving selective attention; the teacher's role must be that of an agent of emotional regulation, incorporating into lesson planning dedicated time for effective breathing techniques and emotional regulation sessions where emotions are identified and managed.

The significant contributions of this research lie not simply in the fact that students pay attention in class, but in how the school or the classroom teacher provides students with strategies or resources to manage their attention and self-regulate their emotions, so that they can maintain focus on school activities; based on the authors cited, the following analysis supports the teaching of emotional self-regulation in primary education in Mexico.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS.

After analyzing the theory drawn from recent educational research articles in the literature on emotional education, self-regulation, and attention processes, the following key findings emerge:

First, there is a direct relationship between emotions and the level of attention students pay during their learning processes. That is, according to educational psychology and neuroeducation—and in line with Zimmerman's theory—emotional self-regulation is necessary for maintaining attention during learning processes. Since this is a cyclical process that can be trained through emotional intervention strategies employed by teachers, it is feasible to achieve emotional self-regulation in elementary school students. Second, under the current basic education plans and programs (New Mexican School), social-emotional learning is a cross-cutting theme; however, in elementary school classrooms, teachers are unaware of strategies to apply emotional self-regulation among students in their classes and to achieve sustained student attention during learning processes. This leads to the proposal of a series of strategies that address this need and enable the achievement of emotional self-regulation.

Third, based on the analysis of the theories by Goleman (1995) and Rojas Estape (2024), it must be recognized that students should identify, name, and self-regulate the emotions they experience; This capacity for regulation is not an innate ability in children but must be practiced through a series of actions that achieve effective self-regulation in students. Therefore, based on the analysis of the reviewed theory, I propose the following conclusions that promote emotional self-regulation and improve students' sustained attention.

This can be seen in the following diagram:

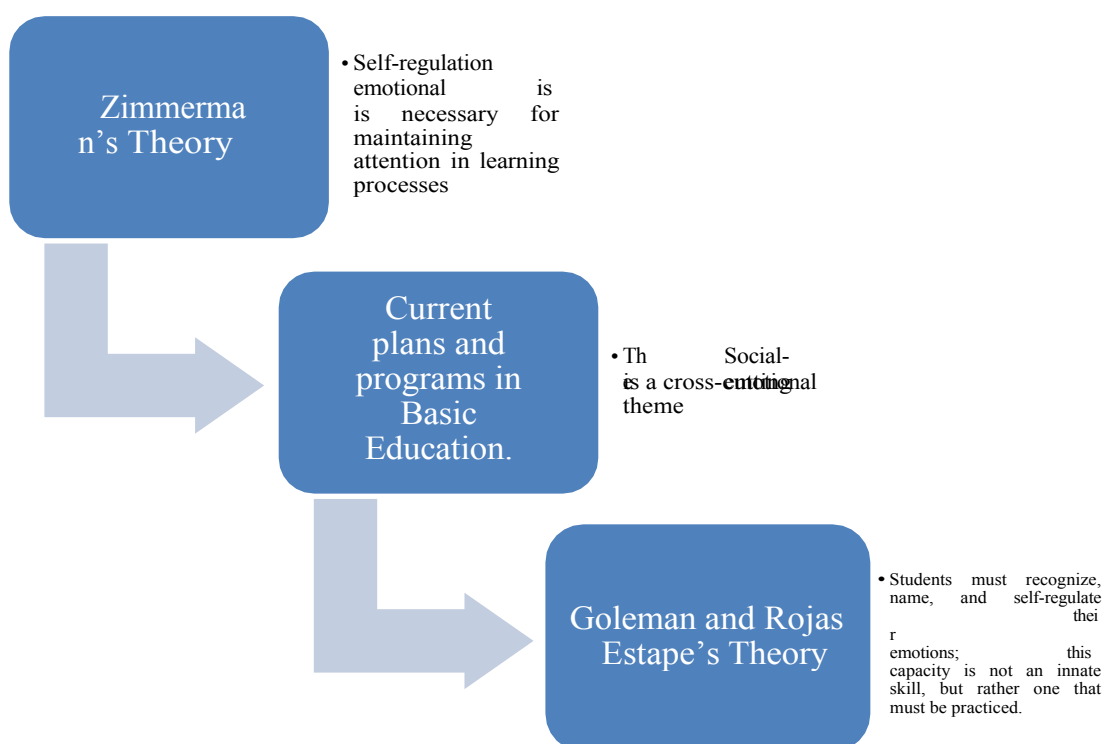


Figure 1. *Revised theoretical framework.*

Source: Author's own work.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the evaluation and analysis of the selected theoretical information, the following proposal for specific strategies to be implemented in primary school classrooms within the Mexican education system is presented. These strategies aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice and, through students' emotional self-regulation, enable them to achieve effective or selective attention during learning processes. Each

of these strategies is grounded in the scientific evidence regarding emotions and attention within the theoretical framework of this research.

1. In each class session, students should set short-term goals related to their learning; therefore, it is essential that students, starting in the early grades of elementary school, know before class begins what the objective or expected learning outcome is. This practice is based on Zimmerman's (2000) anticipation phase and is also directly related to the ideas of Valentina Ronqui et al. (2021), who note that self-regulation is strengthened when students know the purpose of the task they are about to perform and uncertainty is reduced, helping students pay closer attention to what they need to do in their learning tasks.
2. Students should practice mindfulness activities, such as breathing exercises like yoga, controlled breathing, and active breaks. According to González-Cortez and Lagos-San Martín (2022), these programs are effective for self-regulating attention and training the brain to ignore irrelevant stimuli that can cause one to lose focus on established goals. Currently, under the New Mexican School approach, the aim is to address students' emotions and help them self-regulate their emotions so they can follow the instructions for the projects assigned to them; breathing exercises are a strategy that serves as a mediator between emotions and attention.
3. To improve selective attention, we propose implementing the "traffic light" strategy for performance and attention levels. This is implemented in the classroom using a poster displaying the colors of a traffic light: green indicates effective performance and attention levels; orange indicates the need to improve attention levels and self-regulate emotions; finally, red indicates that the student needs to improve their attention and self-regulate their emotions, focusing their reflection on their actions toward effective attention. As Pinzón Navarro et al. (2024) indicate, constant monitoring of attention through the attention traffic light system allows students to adjust their effort according to the demands of the task assigned to them, thereby improving their attention.
4. Set aside time in class to help students identify and name their emotions. It is essential to note that, when studying emotions, they should not be categorized

according to the theory proposed by Zimmerman; this self-assessment significantly influences subsequent sessions or classes. The purpose of the self-reflection mentioned is to help students achieve self-regulated learning through the proper management of their emotions.

9. According to the New Mexican School, peer-to-peer and collaborative work is fundamental to project-based learning; moving forward together without leaving anyone behind and without forgetting others are the essential premises of this new educational paradigm. Therefore, the proposal is to engage in collaborative work and ensure that attention is given to working together. This strategy is based on the idea that self-regulation also has a social dimension and a socioeconomic context, as analyzed by Daniel Trias et al. (2021), allowing students with greater regulatory skills to serve as role models for their peers.
10. Feedback and emotional feedback are other strategies proposed in these approaches to linking emotional theory and selective attention in improving learning processes. The sharing of ideas, as well as the collective validation of efforts to achieve selective attention in learning processes, are emotional drivers that ensure that effort and dedication are rewarded and valued by classmates.

The consistent application of the strategies proposed in this research study is essential for teaching emotional self-regulation to elementary school students in Mexico. Primary school students' attention spans must be trained and exercised; this is a skill that must be developed and strengthened in Mexican classrooms, and teachers serve as agents of students' emotional self-regulation. Promoting comprehensive emotional education enables students to develop social and emotional skills that benefit not only their academic performance but also their personal well-being.

As Marian Rojas Estape (2024) points out, people with high emotional intelligence are more effective at resolving interpersonal problems and managing their emotions, which has a positive impact on their academic performance. It is essential that both teachers and students recognize the importance of emotions in the classroom and actively work on self-regulation.

Social-emotional learning must become the driving force behind student learning; today, theories from neuroscience and educational psychology encourage the reflection on and practice of emotions in the classroom and for life.

The incorporation of the aforementioned strategies for emotional self-regulation proposed in this study enhances student engagement and improves classroom dynamics by fostering healthy, collaborative relationships, as noted by Chilean philosopher Juan Casassus (2006), recipient of the 2025 National Prize for Educational Sciences, "there is no learning outside the emotional realm," which underscores the central role that emotions play in facilitating or hindering learning processes. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers, as guides in regulating emotions, practice the proposed emotional self-regulation strategies in the classroom and at school to improve student attention.

FUTURE WORK

Based on the conclusions of this research, the aim is to strengthen, in the near future, the understanding of the role of emotions in educational attainment gaps and their impact on primary education in Mexico, with the challenge of incorporating teaching strategies for emotional resilience, as well as strategies for managing frustration, anxiety, and childhood depression into pedagogical practices, and that neuroscience provide practical tools to enhance the teaching experience for the emotional management of students.

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