



Using the Color Monster to Develop Teaching Materials and Pedagogical Approaches for the Emotional Domain in Taiwanese Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT: This article considers how connections between picture books and children's everyday experiences can enable children to experience, understand, express, and regulate emotions through authentic interactions and lived experiences. This perspective suggests that emotional education in early childhood can move beyond the knowledge-oriented goal of "recognizing emotions" toward the experience-oriented process of "experiencing emotions," making emotional learning not merely a specific instructional topic but an ongoing learning process embedded in children's everyday lives and interpersonal interactions.

INTRODUCTION

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a rapidly developing domain during early childhood and involves complex interactions among multiple levels and dimensions. For example, consider a six-year-old boy who is learning to identify the emotions of a child who has lost a toy. This task requires the integration of multiple cognitive processes, including interpreting the social context, understanding another person's reactions, and identifying appropriate lexical labels for the corresponding emotional state. However, the abundance of irrelevant information in the environment may lead children to misinterpret the social context or another person's experiences, resulting in, for example, an incorrect appraisal of the emotion (e.g., identifying it as happiness rather than sadness) or an inaccurate assessment of its intensity (e.g., perceiving sadness as more or less intense than it actually is). Accordingly, SEL also involves becoming increasingly sensitive and selective in processing the flow of information in the surrounding environment. Furthermore, children need to develop more refined information processing and perceptual discrimination. For example, they may learn to attend to relevant details such as others' facial expressions, body postures, and behavioral cues, as well as to use increasingly precise combinations of simple or compound words to label the emotional states being referred to. SEL also requires the integration of both domain-general and domain-specific abilities, including attention, inductive reasoning, mentalizing others' thoughts and feelings, contextual appraisal, and situational judgment. Finally, SEL depends on children's actual experiences of social interaction.

When children have limited knowledge and experience of social situations, they may have difficulty accurately inferring the emotions associated with others' experiences. Thus, when children's opportunities for social interaction are constrained, their limited experiential knowledge may increase the likelihood of inaccurate emotional judgments (Lin, 2026).

Taiwan's current *Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework* identifies the "emotional domain" as one of its six major curriculum domains, highlighting the important role of emotional development in early childhood education. Emotional education involves not only children's abilities to recognize, understand, and express their own emotions, but also their abilities to understand others' emotions in social interactions, regulate their emotional responses, and establish appropriate interpersonal relationships. In other words, the curriculum framework emphasizes that children should develop the ability to perceive, recognize, express, and regulate their own emotions through everyday experiences, while simultaneously learning to understand and respect the emotional feelings of others, thereby promoting psychological well-being and healthy personality development. From a developmental perspective, emotions are not an isolated domain independent of cognitive, linguistic, and social development; rather, they are closely intertwined with children's learning, interactions, and everyday experiences. Therefore, emotional education in preschools should not be implemented solely through designated emotional education courses or instructional activities. Instead, it should be integrated into children's daily routines, play, peer interactions, and curriculum experiences, enabling children to gradually develop emotional awareness, expression, and regulation in authentic and meaningful contexts. This approach is consistent with the Preschool Education and Care Curriculum Framework, which emphasizes curriculum integration and the selection of learning content based on children's lived experiences and local environments. Against this background, this study uses *The Color Monster* as a pedagogical medium to explore how picture books can be transformed into teaching materials and pedagogical approaches for emotional education in early childhood. It further examines how children's recognition and understanding of emotions can be extended to emotional awareness, expression, and regulation in everyday contexts. In other words, rather than focusing solely on "teaching children to recognize emotions," this study considers how connections between picture books and children's everyday experiences can enable children to experience, understand, express, and regulate emotions through authentic interactions and lived experiences. This perspective suggests that emotional education in early childhood can move beyond the knowledge-oriented goal of "recognizing emotions" toward the experience-oriented process of "experiencing emotions," making emotional learning not merely a specific instructional topic but an ongoing learning process embedded in children's everyday lives and interpersonal interactions (Ministry of Education, 2017; Shao & Shih, 2024; Shih, 2020a, 2020b).

CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES IN THE EMOTIONAL DOMAIN

The curriculum objectives in the emotional domain encompass four core competencies: "awareness and identification," "expression," "understanding," and "regulation," across two learning dimensions: "self" and "others and the environment." The objectives are designed to guide young children from recognizing and understanding their own emotions to identifying and understanding the emotions of others, expressing emotions appropriately, and gradually developing strategies for emotional regulation. The specific curriculum objectives are as follows: (1) Emotional Awareness and Identification: Emo-1-1: Become aware of and identify one's own emotions; Emo-1-2: Become aware of and identify the emotions of others and anthropomorphized objects in the living environment. (2) Emotional Expression: Emo-2-1: Express one's own emotions appropriately. Emo-2-2: Appropriately express the emotions of others and anthropomorphized objects in the living environment. (3) Emotional Understanding: Emo-3-1: Understand the causes of one's own emotional responses. Emo-3-2: Understand the causes of emotional responses in others and anthropomorphized objects in the living environment. (4) Emotional Regulation: Emo-4-1: Use strategies to regulate one's own emotions (Ministry of Education, 2017).

EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT AND REGULATION SKILLS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Emotional management and regulation are important components of young children's social-emotional development. Rather than simply teaching children to "control" their emotions, emotional education should help children gradually recognize, understand, express, and regulate their emotions while learning to respond appropriately to the emotions and needs of others in social interactions. Emotional competence generally encompasses interconnected abilities such as emotional awareness, emotional understanding, emotional expression, and emotional regulation, all of which contribute to children's interpersonal relationships, social adjustment, and psychological well-being (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 2010; VeryBaby, 2026). Accordingly, emotional management and regulation in early childhood can be developed through the following dimensions.

3.1 Emotional Recognition and Awareness

Emotional recognition is an important starting point for emotional management. Young children gradually learn to identify their own and others' emotions and to understand the relationships among emotions, situations, thoughts, and behaviors. Teachers can use storybooks, pictures, facial-expression cards, music, and everyday situations to help children recognize basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. Through concrete and meaningful experiences, children can gradually become aware of questions such as "How am I feeling now?" and "What made me feel this way?" thereby developing an initial awareness of their emotions. Research has indicated that children's ability to recognize and understand emotions provides an important foundation for the subsequent development of appropriate emotional regulation and social interaction skills (Denham, 1998; Denham et al., 2012; VeryBaby, 2026).

3.2 Emotional Understanding and Expression

After learning to recognize emotions, young children need to further understand the causes of their emotions and learn to express their feelings appropriately. Emotional expression is an important component of children's social-emotional competence, and appropriate emotional expression contributes to positive interpersonal interactions. Teachers can provide a safe, accepting, and nonjudgmental environment in which children are encouraged to express their feelings verbally, such as saying, "I am angry" or "I am sad because my toy was taken away." For children who have not yet developed sufficient verbal abilities to express their emotions, drawing, music, movement, and role-play can provide alternative forms of emotional expression. Through these experiences, children can gradually move from expressing emotions primarily through crying, aggression, or withdrawal toward using more socially appropriate ways of communicating their feelings (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 2010; VeryBaby, 2026).

3.3 Emotional Regulation Strategies

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to modify the intensity, duration, and expression of emotional responses in ways that enable individuals to cope with different situations and social demands. For young children, emotional regulation is still developing; therefore, children need adult support, appropriate environmental arrangements, and repeated opportunities for practice to gradually develop this capacity. Teachers can incorporate emotional regulation strategies into children's everyday activities rather than introducing them only when children become emotionally overwhelmed. For example: Deep breathing and relaxation exercises: Teachers can guide children to practice slow and regular breathing. For example, children can imagine that their abdomen is a balloon: they slowly inhale to make the balloon bigger and then slowly exhale to make it smaller. This may help reduce emotional arousal. Calm-down areas or quiet spaces: A safe, quiet, and supportive space can be provided so that children can temporarily move away from an emotionally stimulating situation and gradually regain emotional stability through reading, drawing, or other quiet activities. Importantly, a calm-down area should function as a supportive space for emotional regulation rather than as a form of punishment or isolation. Attention shifting: When children experience intense emotions, adults can help them temporarily shift their

attention toward another activity. Once the emotional intensity has decreased, the original problem can be revisited and discussed. Visual emotional tools: Emotion thermometers, facial-expression charts, emotion cards, and colors can transform abstract emotions into concrete experiences that children can observe, identify, and discuss. Such tools may facilitate children's emotional vocabulary and understanding. Problem-solving strategies: Once children become emotionally calmer, teachers can guide them to consider questions such as "What happened?", "What can I do?", and "Is there another way to solve this problem?" In this way, emotional regulation can be connected with problem-solving and social competence (Denham et al., 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Thompson, 1994; VeryBaby, 2026)

3.4 Role-Playing and the Development of Empathy

Role-playing provides young children with opportunities to simulate real-life social situations and practice recognizing their own and others' emotions while considering appropriate responses. Through observation, imitation, and participation in social interactions, children gradually develop an understanding of others' emotions and perspectives, as well as empathy and social problem-solving skills. For example, teachers can create situations such as "Someone took my toy," "A friend does not want to play with me," or "A classmate fell down." Children can then discuss how different characters might feel and practice expressing their own needs and responding appropriately to others' emotions. Such activities extend emotional education beyond individual emotional management to interpersonal interaction and social understanding (Denham, 1998; VeryBaby, 2026).

3.5 Adult Emotional Support and Modeling

Young children's emotional regulation abilities do not develop entirely through individual efforts; rather, they gradually emerge through interactions with parents, teachers, and other significant adults. The ways in which adults respond to children's emotions can influence how children understand, express, and regulate their own emotions. Therefore, when children experience intense emotions, teachers and parents should first regulate their own emotional responses and respond to children with calmness and acceptance. Rather than immediately criticizing or punishing the child, adults should seek to understand the emotions and needs underlying the child's behavior. For example, an adult might first respond by saying, "I know you are angry right now. Let's calm down together." Once the child has regained emotional stability, the adult can discuss the problem and possible solutions with the child. This process, in which adults initially provide support, modeling, and guidance and gradually transfer responsibility for regulation to the child, can be understood as co-regulation, an important process through which children progressively develop autonomous emotional regulation abilities. Thus, emotional education should not focus solely on teaching children specific "calming techniques"; it should also emphasize the relationships, interactions, and emotional support between adults and children (Morris et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2015; VeryBaby, 2026).

In conclusion, emotional management in early childhood should not be understood as requiring children to suppress or eliminate negative emotions. Rather, it involves helping children gradually develop the capacities to recognize, understand, express, and regulate emotions and respond to others. Through storybooks, play, role-playing, artistic activities, and everyday social situations, children can learn emotional regulation through authentic and meaningful experiences. More importantly, emotional education should move beyond simply "teaching children to recognize emotions" toward enabling children to experience, understand, express, and regulate emotions in their everyday lives. In this way, emotional learning can become an integral part of children's daily experiences and interpersonal interactions (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Shih, 2020, 2022; Shih et al, 2026; VeryBaby, 2026).

THE APPLICATION OF *THE COLOR MONSTER* IN TEACHING MATERIALS AND METHODS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

The Color Monster presents different emotions that young children may experience in their everyday lives in a concrete and imaginative manner. Through the use of colors, illustrations, and narrative elements, the book helps children transform their otherwise abstract and difficult-to-describe inner emotions into experiences that can be observed, identified, and expressed. For young children, an important starting point for emotional education is the development of emotional awareness and recognition, enabling them to gradually identify their emotional states, understand the causes of their emotions, and learn to express and regulate them appropriately. From this perspective, *The Color Monster* can serve as a medium for early childhood emotional education, allowing children to recognize basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear through stories and illustrations and to connect these emotional experiences with their own everyday lives. Children's emotional understanding does not develop simply through learning emotion-related vocabulary; rather, it gradually develops through interactions with adults and peers, language communication, and everyday lived experiences (Denham, 1998; Saarni, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, teachers can use open-ended questions to encourage children to reflect on questions such as, "When do I feel this way?", "What does my emotional monster look like?", and "What can I do when I feel this way?" In this way, picturebook reading can become a meaningful learning context for emotional experience, language expression, and social interaction. Furthermore, the narrative contexts provided by picturebooks allow children to encounter different characters' emotions, perspectives, and life experiences and to understand others' feelings through characters and story events. Children's literature and picturebooks therefore serve not merely as tools for developing language and literacy skills but also provide opportunities for children to engage in perspective-taking, emotional understanding, and social interaction. When teachers further encourage children to compare the emotional experiences of story characters with their own experiences through discussion, role-play, and sharing of lived experiences, children can move beyond simply "recognizing emotions" toward developing an understanding of their own emotions and those of others. However, early childhood emotional education should not be limited to recognizing emotion labels or categorizing different emotions. The development of emotional competence involves multiple dimensions, including emotional awareness, understanding, expression, regulation, and the ability to establish appropriate relationships with others. Therefore, the educational value of *The Color Monster* should extend beyond helping children "know what emotions are." More importantly, through connections with authentic everyday contexts, the book can provide opportunities for children to experience emotions, express their feelings, understand others, and gradually develop appropriate strategies for emotional regulation. In other words, picturebooks can serve as important educational media that connect emotion, language, lived experiences, and interpersonal interaction. When children use stories to understand emotions, connect the emotional experiences depicted in the stories with their own lived experiences, and reconsider their feelings through dialogue and sharing with peers, learning can move beyond the acquisition of emotional knowledge toward the construction of emotional meaning. Accordingly, early childhood emotional education can move from "teaching children to recognize emotions" toward "enabling children to experience, understand, express, and regulate emotions in everyday life." From this perspective, emotions are not merely objects that need to be controlled; rather, they can become important mediators through which children understand themselves, understand others, develop relationships, and support their learning and development (Denham, 1998; Hsu et al, 2025; Nikolajeva, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1978; Saarni, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

5. CONCLUSION

The Color Monster uses colors, illustrations, and storytelling to transform young children's relatively abstract emotional experiences into concrete and meaningful representations of everyday life, thereby providing an accessible context for children to understand and talk about emotions. The colors and characters presented in the picturebook can help children recognize and differentiate basic

emotions. When teachers further guide children through questions, discussions, and responsive interactions that connect the story to their own lived experiences, the picturebook becomes more than a reading material; it can serve as an important medium through which children express emotions, understand others, and share their everyday experiences (Chen et al., 2026; Lee, 2016). Therefore, early childhood emotional education should move beyond teaching children simply to “recognize emotions” and instead provide opportunities for them to experience, understand, express, and regulate emotions within authentic and meaningful interactional contexts. Within this context, emotion talk (ET) can serve as an important bridge connecting picturebook reading with children’s emotional learning. Emotion talk should not be understood merely as adults explaining emotions or teaching emotion-related vocabulary to young children. Rather, it represents an important emotion socialization process through which children use language and interaction to make sense of their emotional experiences. When teachers invite children to discuss why a story character is angry or sad, or what the character might need, children are not simply learning emotion labels; they are gradually learning to connect emotions with their situational causes, personal thoughts, and possible behavioral responses. In this sense, emotion talk transforms children’s emotional experiences into linguistic experiences and supports their construction of emotional understanding and meaning through dialogue (Chan et al., 2023; Denham, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Garner et al., 1997; Morris et al., 2007; Ye & Shih, 2021). More importantly, the learning generated through emotion talk extends beyond children’s understanding of their own emotions to include their understanding of the emotions and psychological states of others. When teachers use picturebook narratives to ask questions such as “How do you think the character feels?”, “Why might the character feel this way?”, or “What would you do if you were the character?”, children are encouraged to consider others’ feelings, thoughts, and needs. Such dialogic interactions can support children’s emotional understanding, empathy, and perspective-taking abilities (Denham, 1998; Dunn & Brown, 1994). Emotion talk, therefore, should not be regarded solely as a pedagogical strategy for individual emotional development; rather, it can be understood as a relational and dialogic process of social learning through which children develop an understanding of both themselves and others through interactions with teachers and peers. From this perspective, the educational value of *The Color Monster* does not lie solely in its colors, illustrations, and narrative content, but also in how teachers transform the picturebook into an open space for emotional dialogue. The picturebook provides symbolic representations of emotional experiences, while emotion talk uses linguistic interaction to transform these representations into experiences that children can understand, express, and discuss. Teachers can begin with the emotions experienced by the characters and gradually encourage children to connect these emotions with their own lived experiences by asking questions such as, “Have you ever felt this way?” or “What do you do when you feel angry to help yourself feel better?” In this way, picturebook reading can move beyond one-way comprehension of a story and become a multidirectional dialogue among children, teachers, peers, and the text. Accordingly, early childhood emotional education should move from “teaching children to recognize emotions” toward “talking with children about emotions” and, ultimately, toward enabling children to experience, understand, express, and regulate emotions in authentic life situations and interpersonal interactions. Within this process, teachers are no longer merely transmitters of emotional knowledge but become facilitators of dialogue, co-constructors of emotional meaning, and supporters of children’s learning. This perspective also suggests that the purpose of emotion talk should not be to require children to produce “correct” emotional responses according to adult expectations. Instead, it should provide a safe, open, and supportive dialogic space in which children can express their feelings, understand different perspectives, and gradually develop the capacity to regulate and negotiate emotions. Thus, picturebooks and emotion talk can jointly constitute important educational media and pedagogical pathways for young children’s socioemotional learning. Picturebooks provide concrete representations of emotional experiences through words, images, colors, and narratives, while emotion talk enables children to connect these textual and symbolic experiences with their own lived worlds through linguistic interaction. Emotional learning consequently extends beyond simply knowing what it means to feel happy, sad, angry, or afraid. It involves gradually developing

an understanding of why emotions arise, how emotions can be expressed, how others may experience emotions differently, and how emotions can be regulated and negotiated within social interactions.

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