

<b>Institution:</b> Anglia Ruskin University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 4		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Increasing parental emotional validation and children's emotional awareness using <i>My First Emotions</i>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2002 - 2016		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> John Lambie	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Associate Professor	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2001 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 to 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Lambie's work on <i>My First Emotions</i> (an award-winning set of toys and books teaching parents and children about emotions) has had international impact on parenting behaviour and children's emotional awareness. Poor emotional awareness in children has been linked to poorer child mental health, an area of current concern, with the WHO estimating in 2020 that 10-20% of children worldwide experience mental health disorders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 13,000 copies of <i>My First Emotions</i> have been sold globally in 35 countries across 5 continents, with a sales revenue of £900,000.</li> <li>• Evidence collected demonstrated an increase in parents' use of emotion validation in over 150 parents in Russia and the UK, and an increase in emotional awareness in more than 300 children in Russia and the UK, including in atypically developing children.</li> <li>• More than 30 service providers across Cambridgeshire, UK (early years' teachers in nursery settings, and family workers providing social care) reported a change in professional practice, as a result of <i>My First Emotions</i>.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>John Lambie, Associate Professor in Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University, developed an influential model of emotional awareness showing that being aware of one's emotions is not straightforward, requiring a certain kind of focused attention and the learning of emotion categories (<b>Reference 1</b>). Further work on this model (<b>Reference 2</b>; <b>Reference 3</b>) led to the conclusion that parenting was vitally important in teaching young children how to be aware of their emotions, and this was demonstrated in an empirical study (<b>Reference 4</b>). The research on parental "emotion validation" in this study (initially carried out in 2012-13) led directly to the development of the toy set <i>My First Emotions</i>, which went on sale in 2016.</p> <p><b>Parents' Emotional Validation</b></p> <p>The key concept in the research was "emotion validation" — this was found by Lambie to be the chief link in developing children's emotional awareness (<b>Reference 4</b>). Although the idea of emotion validation was well known in clinical psychology, there had been no previous observational demonstrations showing that parents' use of emotion validation was linked to their child's emotional awareness.</p> <p>Emotion validation was defined by Lambie as accurately and non-judgmentally referring to the emotion or the emotional perspective of the child. For example, "I can see you are sad", or "that must be really annoying". Emotion invalidation was defined as negating, ignoring, or dismissing the child's emotion, e.g. saying "don't be sad" or "cheer up! There's nothing to worry about."</p> <p><b>Children's Emotional Awareness</b></p> <p>Lambie examined how mothers' use of emotion validation in real time related to their children's</p>		

emotional awareness (**Reference 4**). Mothers and their children (aged 4-7 years) were videotaped while playing a game. Mothers' use of emotion validation and emotion invalidation were coded, and compared to their child's ability to accurately name their emotions during the game (i.e. to display emotional awareness).

Mothers' use of emotion validation was the strongest predictor of children's emotional awareness, and child awareness was not affected by their verbal IQ or their ability to recognize facial expressions of other people's emotions. These results suggested that children's accurate attention to their own emotion states, i.e. their emotional awareness, was significantly shaped by their mother's use of emotional validation/invalidation, over and above their IQ, or general level of emotional understanding. We also found that the children's emotional awareness during the game was linked to a subsequent measure of the child's ability to regulate their emotions.

### Development of the Intervention: My First Emotions

It was interesting that only about one third of mothers' interactions with their child's negative emotions were observed to be validating, and the other two thirds were invalidating (**Reference 4**). The problem seemed to be that many mothers wanted to "keep their children happy" and therefore were inadvertently trying to "get rid of" their child's negative emotions, leading to invalidation.

Lambie saw a need for emotional validation training — and a message that "it's OK for children to have negative emotions", and thus devised a parental training program, finding in a randomized controlled pilot study that the training increased mothers' emotional validation significantly (**Reference 4**).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Lambie, J.A. & Marcel, A.J. (2002). Consciousness and the varieties of emotion experience: A theoretical framework. *Psychological Review*, 109, 219-259. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.2.219>
2. Lambie, J.A. (2008). On the irrationality of emotion and the rationality of awareness. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 17(3), 946-971. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2007.03.005>
3. Lambie, J.A. (2009). Emotion experience, rational action, and self-knowledge. *Emotion Review*, 1, 272-280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073909103596>
4. Lambie, J., & Lindberg, A. (2016). The role of maternal emotional validation and invalidation on children's emotional awareness. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 62(2), 129-157. <https://doi.org/10.13110/merrpalmquar1982.62.2.0129> (this output is included in REF2)

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Lambie was approached by Skylark-Umnitsa, a group of Russian and British publishing companies (also known as Skylark Learning) in 2015. Skylark had read about the research on Lambie's ARU web profile and wanted to develop a toy set to teach young children about emotions. Lambie was involved in all aspects of the design of the toy set (including writing the parenting guide and designing many of the activities), and the underlying principles of the set was directly based on Lambie's research on emotional validation.

*My First Emotions* includes: a parenting guide; 5 emotion toys and 5 emotion books (anger, fear, love, happiness, and sadness), a cuddly rabbit (with a pouch to put the emotion toys in), a set of emotion cards, and an activity book. It was put on sale in 2016.

Lambie's research informs all aspects of the toy set (for example, each emotion story shows the parent doing emotion validation, and these stories were edited by Lambie to make sure that validation was portrayed in a way consistent with his research findings), his research is cited in the parenting guide, and his name is listed as the lead author of *My First Emotions*.

*My First Emotions* has a global reach. It is available through global suppliers, including Amazon, and the Russian mass online retailers Ozon and Wildberries, and has sold over 13,000 copies in

35 countries across 5 continents [5a]. Originally written in English, it has been translated into Russian, Spanish and Chinese, and sold more than 5,000 copies in Russia and 2,000 copies in China. Sales revenue generated is about £900,000. It has been bought in the following countries: Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brunei, Canada, China, Chile, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honk Kong, Italy, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Mexico, Republic of Moldova, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, UK, USA, and Uzbekistan [5a].

The timescale of the impact has been from 2016 to present with some follow up data showing that changes have been maintained for up to two years [5c]. The impact data presented below comes from Russia and the UK, from a content analysis of feedback relating to 505 individuals (children, parents, service providers) [5c], and from qualitative and quantitative measures from two small scale UK intervention studies [5b, 5e].

#### **(a) Increases in parental emotional validation**

A content analysis [5c] of feedback from 158 parents after using *My First Emotions* showed that 95% of parents reported an increase in their use of emotional validation (including talking more to their child about emotions). 5% reported no impact. The parents in this sample were from Russia (N= 108), and the UK (N=50). In an intervention study in Wisbech, UK, 89% of parents reported increases in their use of emotion validation [5b]. Here is an indicative quote:

“I feel I listen to my child more...and think more about how she might be feeling rather than dismiss those feelings. I now try not to use the phrases “don’t be silly” or “it doesn’t matter”. I feel my child calms down better now. I feel closer to my child.” (UK mother of a 2-year-old girl)

Two small intervention studies in Wisbech and Cambridge using quantitative measures found an increase in levels of emotional validation in parents after training with *My First Emotions* [5e], and a decrease in levels of emotional *invalidation* [5c].

#### **(b) Increases in children’s emotional awareness**

A content analysis [5c] of feedback relating to 271 children using *My First Emotions* found that parents and service providers reported a positive impact on emotional awareness and/or emotion regulation in 260 children (96%) as a result of using *My First Emotions*. No impact was reported for 4% of children. The specific areas of impact were: an increase in children’s awareness of emotion; including talking more about emotions (85%); and an increase in children’s emotion regulation skills (including calming down more easily) (39%). These were overlapping groups, with a total of 29% reporting an increase in both awareness and regulation skills. The children reported on were from Russia (N=77) and the UK (N= 194). Here is an indicative quote:

“They do talk a lot more about emotions. My child will actually say ‘I am crying, I am upset’ ... Before all they would do was scream.” (UK mother of a 4-year-old girl)

An intervention in Wisbech, UK [5b], using both qualitative and quantitative measures, found a statistically significant increase in 2-to-5-year-old children’s emotional awareness after using *My First Emotions* for four weeks [5c]. A small-scale study on atypically developing children in Cambridge [5e] found a reported increase in emotional awareness in children with Down’s syndrome and autism after using *My First Emotions*.

Survey data following up the use of *My First Emotions* in four Cambridgeshire preschools confirmed that approximately 130 children benefitted in terms of increased emotion understanding and awareness over the eight months from February to October 2019 [5c].

In a wider context, the findings summarized in (a) and (b) are important because increased parental validation leads to increased emotion awareness in children, and it is known from the research literature that better emotion awareness in children is associated with their better mental

health.

### (c) Changes in professional practice of service providers (in a UK region of local need)

A total of 35 service providers in Cambridgeshire (early years' teachers in preschools, and family workers) provided feedback on the impact of *My First Emotions* on their professional practice.

*My First Emotions* has been used as a resource for family workers in Wisbech since October 2018, and in a total of 9 preschools in Cambridgeshire (mainly in the Wisbech region) since February 2019. Wisbech was identified as an area of local need as it is in the top 10% most deprived regions of England (Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2015). There are many young parents struggling to cope on low incomes and low levels of social support. In consultation with Cambridge & Peterborough Children's Services, Lambie identified Wisbech as an area to target parenting support relating to children's emotions, and together with a child clinical psychologist, Lambie provided training to family workers and preschool teachers in a number of sessions in 2018-19 across Cambridgeshire, including Peterborough, Wisbech, and Cambridge.

A content analysis of all feedback from service providers (teachers and family workers) found that 93% reported a positive impact on their professional practice [5c]. 7% reported no impact. The areas of impact were: an increase in teaching children about emotion (49%); helping children who are struggling with controlling emotions (34%); teaching parents how to validate (63%); and increasing their own validation skills (31%). These were overlapping categories as several informants reported two or more of these aspects. Family workers reported in particular that the "validation plus boundaries" technique was a new skill they have now incorporated into their professional practice with their clients.

Follow-up data from four of the preschools confirmed that they use the resources on a daily basis and that they have become part of the routine of the school [5c]. Follow-up data from Wisbech family services [5d] confirms that family workers continue to use aspects of the emotional validation programme when delivering "Raising Children and Incredible Years Parenting" programmes and that they continue to deliver parenting courses using *My First Emotions*. They have also shared learning gained from *My First Emotions* with partner agencies and health visitors [5d].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- a) Global sales figures of *My First Emotions* from Skylark Learning. Contact: Managing Director, Skylark Learning.
- b) Lambie, J.A., Lambie, H.J., & Sadek, S. (2019). "My child will actually say 'I am upset'... Before all they would do was scream": Teaching parents emotion validation in a social care setting. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 46, 627–636.  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cch.12770>
- c) Beglin, S.J. & Lambie, J.A. (2020). Content analysis and inferential statistics relating to feedback from *My First Emotions*. Anglia Ruskin University.
- d) Letter confirming use of *My First Emotions* in Children, Families and Adult Services (Wisbech), Cambridgeshire County Council.
- e) Gyimes, L. (2018). The experience of an emotional validation intervention with parents of developmentally disabled children. Unpublished Master's Dissertation, ARU.
- f) Awards won by *My First Emotions*: Made for Mums Toy Awards 2017. Silver medal (educational toy category). Independent Toy Awards 2016. Silver medal. See the following webposts:  
<https://www.madeformums.com/reviews/madeformums-toy-awards-2017-winners/>  
<https://toynews-online.biz/2016/09/02/independent-toy-award-2016-winners-revealed/>