

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SCHOOL READINESS

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ABSTRACT

This has focused on the concept of social emotional school readiness of the children at early stage of their education. The children at their early age faces many socio-biological, psychological, behavioral and emotional problems. To cope up with these problems the parents, teachers, family members, society and environment in general play a major role. The children should be mentally prepared at the earliest for the schooling process. They are emotionally prepared for their school education. Parents and teachers intentionally adopt many methods to make the children socially emotionally ready for school. This is the most crucial part of their educational life. The social emotional school readiness involves overall development of children emotionally, psychologically, behaviorally etc which will be helpful for their higher growth in coming life.

Key Words: social emotional, emotional competence, school readiness, cognitive development.

Introduction

Social-emotional competence is an important component of young children's school readiness as it continues to contribute to academic success (Fantuzzo *et al.*, 2007; & Raikes, 2007). Children with social-emotional competence engage more with peers and teachers, participate in classroom activities, enjoy learning, and are more likely to experience a positive transition from preschool to next grade (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Children who scored higher on assessments of prosocially

competence were, later on in the year, assessed to be among the most “cognitively ready” for school (Bierman et al. 2009).

The relationships between young children and the adults who care for them matter. In fact, these relationships make an important contribution to children's school readiness. For young children to be able to learn, they need secure attachments to their family and other adults. When children feel safe in their relationships, they are able to explore, learn, play, and create friendships with peers. These important skills, all under the umbrella of "social and emotional development," will last them throughout their lifetime—and it all starts now!

For infants and toddlers, social and emotional development is "the developing capacity to experience and regulate emotions, form secure relationships, and explore and learn—all in the context of the child's family, community, and cultural background." Your program's school readiness goals, likely reflected in the individual objectives you develop for each child should focus on helping children develop these crucial social and emotional skills.

Social-emotional skills include the following:

- The child is able to understand and talk about his/her own feelings.
- The child understands the perspective of others and realizes that their feelings may be different from his/her own feelings.
- The child is able to establish relationships with adults and maintains an ongoing friendship with at least one other child.
- The child is able to enter a group successfully.
- The child is able to engage in and stay with an activity for a reasonable amount of time with minimal adult support.
- The child is cooperative with companions most of the time and understands the need for rules and fair play

Why is Social Emotional Development Important?

Infants and toddlers whose families and other caregivers focus on building trust and healthy relationships set the stage for a lifetime of learning. “Early Childhood Standards for Quality of Infant and toddler Programs”, Michigan State Board of Education, 2006

Promote Social and Emotional Competence

- Teachers engage infants in frequent face-to-face social interactions each day (e.g., verbal and nonverbal behaviors).
- Teachers quickly respond to infants’ and toddlers’ cries or other signs of distress by providing physical comfort and needed care.
- Teachers support children’s development of friendships and provide opportunities for children to play with and learn from each other.
- Teachers help children practice social skills and build friendships by helping them enter into, sustain, and enhance play.
- Teachers help children resolve conflicts by helping them identify feelings, describe problems, and try alternative solutions.
- Teachers help children talk about their own and others’ emotions. They provide opportunities for children to explore a wide range of feelings and the different ways that they can be expressed.
- Teachers actively teach children social communication and emotional regulation.
- Teachers help children manage their behavior by guiding and supporting them to: 1) persist when frustrated; 2) play cooperatively with other children; 3) use language to communicate needs; 4) learn turn taking; 5) gain control of physical impulses; 6) express negative emotions in ways that do not harm others or themselves; 7) use problem-solving techniques; and 8) learn about themselves and others.

Social Competence

Social competence is usually defined as the capacity to initiate and maintain satisfying relationships with peers, as well as to be able to form friendships with some of them. (Katz &

McClellan, 1997) This capacity to get along with peers is the best single predictor of adult adaptation, not IQ, not grades or classroom behavior. (Hartup, 1992)

Emotional Competence

It usually defined as the awareness of one's own feelings and others' feelings, the capacity to empathize with others, the distinction between inner feelings and the outward expression of these feelings, and awareness of the place of emotions in relationships. (Saarni, 1999)

An important lesson to draw from the entire literature on successful early interventions is that it is the social skills and motivation of the child that are more easily altered – not IQ. These social and emotional skills affect performance in school and in the workplace. We too often have a bias toward believing that only cognitive skills are of fundamental importance to success in life. (James J. Heckman, PhD Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, 2000)

Social Emotional Development and School Readiness

According to MDE “Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten”

- Early Learning Expectation 1: Children develop and exhibit a healthy sense of self.
- Early Learning Expectation 2: Children show increasing ability to regulate how they express their emotions.
- Early Learning Expectation 3: Children develop healthy relationships with other children and adults.

Why Else Should We Be Concerned?

- Good Attachment
- Early Brain Development
- Fewer Behavior Problems
- Less Risky Behavior As A Teen
- Future Success As An Adult

How can we make a difference as parents?

- Relationships are the key, be warm, loving and responsive to child's cues and clues
- Talk, sing, read to your child
- Provide consistent routines
- Encourage safe exploration & play, limit TV
- Model appropriate display of emotions, teach feeling words
- Help children to feel good about themselves
- Teach respect for differences
- Assure consistent, quality childcare
- Take care of yourself
- Seek resources when needed

Social and Emotional Development

To develop social and emotional skills, babies need adults who are tuned in to them and respond to them appropriately. These attuned relationships are sometimes referred to as serve and return, because the baby "serves" by making a sound, gesture, or expression, and the adult "returns" with a response. As we grow to understand more about how children learn, we find research continually demonstrating that "a secure, flexible, and trusting relationship with a primary caregiver prepares infants and toddlers for academic and social competence" throughout their lives.

Early Head Start staff members who work directly with children and families are in unique positions to establish such attuned relationships and support children's social and emotional development. Home visitors and teachers in family child care or center-based programs who model strong relationships can be instrumental in fostering them between parents and their young children. In providing continuity between home and school as children develop their social and emotional skills, you can be one of the important adults in a child's early life.

Cognitive development, socio-emotional development and school readiness

Child development can be referred to as the “ordered emergence of interdependent skills of sensor motor, socio-emotional, language, and cognitive functioning” (Engle et al., 2007). Child development is seen as taking place in sequential stages, with sensitive periods of development being more prominent in the first years of life. School readiness is a measure of developmental health (Janus and Offord, 2007) and the developmental domains that appear to be most relevant to the child’s success at school are physical health and well-being, social and emotional competence, approaches to learning, cognitive and language competence, and communication skills (Janus, 2011). Poverty and socio-cultural factors also play a role in the development of the capacities that define school readiness. Indicators of children’s cognitive-language and socio-emotional development are rarely agreed upon in different cultural contexts (Bartlett and Zimanyi, n/y). Child development studies conducted in different settings always face methodological questions: What is culture and what is culturally appropriate? What is socio-emotional well-being? What cognitive competencies should a child achieve in order to succeed later in life. This explains why to date there are no internationally comparable measurements of child development. Whatever the disagreements, some authors argue that, owing to globalization, the developmental skills required by children in order to succeed at school are becoming similar across cultures (Fernald et al., 2009). A search of the literature shows that the following cognitive and socio-emotional domains are regarded as important for school readiness in children who are three to five years of age (Fernald et al., 2009; Janus, 2011; Otaala, B., n/y; Rim-Kaufman et al., 2000). Cognitive-language development Analytical skills and mental problem-solving, concentration and memory, early numerical abilities or knowledge of numbers, knowledge of letters, language and symbol recognition, basic literacy, interest in literacy and knowledge of key personal information (e.g. name and address). Socio-emotional development Social competence, responsibility, respect, readiness to explore new things, pro-social and helping behaviour, capacity to follow directions, capacity to participate in individual and group work, ability to function in groups and wait for a turn, behavior management, self-regulatory abilities, capacity to inhibit an initial response, social perception (of thoughts and feelings) and capacity to play alone or with other children.

The debate on the definition of cognitive-language and socio-emotional development extends to other concepts such as socio-emotional well-being which is characterized by the child's ability to:

- _ Experience, manage and appropriately express emotions;
- _ Regulate his/her behaviour;
- _ Process resilience and coping skills;
- _ Have confidence and persistence in learning;
- _ Comprehend emotions of others;
- _ Develop social skills and empathy;
- _ Establish and maintain relations with others (Hamilton and Redmond, 2010).

How is social and emotional development related to school readiness and early success in school?

To succeed in school, young children need to have certain predictable social competencies and skills.

When young children do not know what to do with their anger, feel very sad, or feel out of control, it is very hard for them to concentrate or to stay out of trouble.

As young children enter school, they will have a hard time if these behaviors do not change.

Role of socio emotional development for children's school readiness

The empirical "case" for the importance of children's socio emotional development in classroom contexts has emerged from several different traditions in developmental, clinical, and educational psychology. From developmental perspectives, converging lines of inquiry from social developmental and neurobehavioral literatures suggest that children enter schools with distinct profiles of emotional reactivity, regulation and executive functioning that appear to facilitate or hinder their engagement with other learners, teachers, and the process of learning

(Blair, 2002; Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Howse, Calkins, Anastopoulos, Keane, & Shelton, 2003; Raver, 2002). Similarly, drawing from a tradition of attachment theory, developmental researchers have highlighted ways that some children establish and maintain relationships with teachers that are characterized by a high degree of mutual positive engagement while other children engage in relationships with teachers that are characterized by a high level of conflict (for review, see Pianta, Justice, Cottone, Mashburn, & Rimm-Kaufman, symposium presentation). Third, clinical and educational psychological studies have highlighted the extent to which children's disruptive, aggressive, and withdrawn behaviors have serious implications for short-term opportunities as well as long-term opportunities for learning, both for children manifesting behavioral difficulty and for their peers (Campbell, Shaw, & Gilliom, 2000). A fourth tradition of observational research in classrooms has highlighted ways that teachers also bring their own regulatory and interpersonal profiles of strength and difficulty to classroom interactions and instruction with their students (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007). These four mechanisms are likely to be transactionally, bi-directionally related as children with varying self-regulatory profiles elicit differing patterns of responsiveness versus conflict with teachers. These variables are also likely to be highly confounded by "omitted variables" or unmeasured characteristics across children, teachers, and settings (Duncan, 2003). For these reasons, investigators across developmental, clinical, and educational fields have come to consensus that experimental and quasi-experimental approaches are integral to our ability to draw causal inferences on the roles and modifiability of these processes as predictors of children's school readiness.

In each of the sections below, a brief literature review is provided for each of these four possible mechanisms supporting low-income children's school readiness. Findings from federally funded research initiatives are then considered, with close attention to whether those interventions yielded clear evidence of significant impacts on children's socio-emotional development (for summary of interventions' designs, samples, and findings).

Children's social cognitions and pro social skills in classroom contexts

A parallel area of research has focused on what children know about their emotions and the negotiation of interpersonal problems, emphasizing the social cognitive mechanisms revealed in children's successes versus failures to get along with peers and adults (see classic work by Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2002). Additional research on children's attachment relationships with teachers, with the development of relationships characterized by closeness versus conflict also informs several interventions funded by the ISRC and PCER initiatives (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Children's social skills and quality of relationship with teachers have been found to be correlated to their later social and academic competence in early elementary school (see Raver, Garner, & Smith-Donald, 2007 for review). Both of those research areas suggest that children develop relatively stable social cognitions or attributions regarding strategies of getting along with peers and adults in classroom contexts. These attributions appear to be built on a foundation of children's knowledge of emotions, knowledge of pro-social behaviors (e.g., helping, sharing, and taking turns), and the ability to generate and use more effective social problem-solving skills (see Domitrovich, Cortes, & Greenberg, 2007).

Past co-relational research has faced the persistent problems of omitted variables bias and reverse causality (or bidirectional influence). For example, children who are temperamentally prone to be more sociable have been found to elicit more positive responses from peers and teachers than do children who express more anger and distress in the classroom (see for example, Justice, Cottone, Mashburn, & Rimm-Kaufman, under review). In the context of those relationships, more well-liked children may have greater opportunities to talk about, process, and remember information about their own and others' feelings, and about strategies for successfully navigating social relationships than might children who are less well-liked. Similarly, children's placement in classrooms with more emotionally supportive teachers and their negotiation of academic as well as social challenges are likely to be at least partially influenced by time-invariant individual and contextual variables that are often "omitted" from models (see O'Connor & McCartney, 2007 for exception and methodological solutions using longitudinal data). It is within this framework that the federally funded research initiatives targeting children's SEL skills are likely to be of major impact to the field. In this area, randomized trials

represent a key opportunity to test causal claims of the role of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula for children's knowledge, attributions, and behaviors regarding pro-social versus aggressive behavior with peers. Interventions targeting teachers' practices also offer the opportunity to test the modifiability of children's relationships with adults in classroom contexts. Outcomes that are commonly tapped in interventions that target children's social problem-solving with peers and positive relationships with teachers include direct assessments of children's emotion understanding, of children's selection of adaptive versus maladaptive strategies in hypothetical vignettes of conflict with peers. Outcome variables also include more general teacher reports of children's social skills as well as teachers' reports of the quality of their relationships with individual children.

With that brief review as an empirical "backdrop," was there evidence from the federally funded research initiatives of significant impact of interventions on children's social problem-solving skills and their ability to get along with peers? Evidence from Project REDI suggests that the intervention, comprised of cognitive and socio-emotional curricula as well as teachers' provision of emotion coaching and support was associated with moderate to medium-sized program impacts for children's emotion understanding and interpersonal problem-solving (*ds* ranging from .15 to .39; Bierman et al., symposium presentation).

Promote Social and Emotional Health and School Readiness in Babies and Young Children

Research tells us that responding to the needs of young children with warmth, providing structure and routines for them, talking with them about feelings, and helping them to problem-solve can pave the way for them to be successful learners. But in reality, parenting is not so easy. Raising young children is sometimes joyful, but it is often challenging, with constant on-the-spot decisions about what to say and do. When parents are stressed about finding a home or meeting public assistance requirements, are worried about health care, or are feeling isolated and lonely, parenting is that much harder.

Parent education programs

How, then, do we assure that children who are struggling with a range of emotional and social problems receive the teaching and support they need to succeed in school? One way is to work with parents to provide them with positive parenting strategies that will build their preschool children's social competencies and academic readiness. Research shows that children with lower emotional and social competencies are more frequently found in families where parents express more hostile parenting, engage in more conflict, and give more attention to children's negative than positive behaviors (Cummings, 1994; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999). Children whose parents are emotionally positive and attend to pro-social behaviors are more likely to be able to self-regulate and respond in nonaggressive ways to conflict situations. Indeed, parent training programs have been the single most successful treatment approach to date for reducing externalizing behavior problems (oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD) in young children (Brestan & Eyberg, 1998). A variety of parenting programs have resulted in clinically significant and sustained reductions in externalizing behavior problems for at least two third of young children treated (e.g., for review, see Brestan & Eyberg, 1998; Taylor & Biglan, 1998). The intervention goals of these programs are to reduce harsh and inconsistent parenting while promoting home-school relationships. These experimental studies provide support for social learning theories that highlight the crucial role that parenting style and discipline effectiveness play in determining children's social competence and reducing externalizing behavior problems at home and in the classroom (Patterson, DeGarmo, & Knutson, 2000). More recently, efforts have been made to implement adaptations of these treatments for use as school-based preschool and early school prevention programs. A review of the literature regarding these parenting prevention programs for early school age children indicates that this approach is very promising (Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001). While there is less available research with preschool children, the preliminary studies are also quite promising. In our own work, we targeted all parents who enrolled in Head Start (children ages 3–5 years). In 2 randomized trials of 500 parents, we reported that the Incredible Years parenting program was effective in strengthening parenting skills for a multiethnic group of parents of preschoolers (Webster-Stratton, 1998; Webster-Stratton et al., 2001a). Externalizing behaviors were significantly reduced for children who were showing above average rates of these behaviors at baseline. Mothers with mental health risk factors, such as high depressive symptoms, reported

physical abuse as children, reported substance abuse, and high levels of anger were able to engage in the parenting program and to benefit from it at levels comparable to parents without these mental health risk factors (Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton, 2003). Similar results were obtained in an independent trial in Chicago with primarily African- American mothers who enrolled their toddlers in low-income day care centers (Gross, Fogg, Webster-Stratton, Garvey, & Grady, 2003).

Teacher training

A second approach to preventing and reducing young children's behavior problems is to train teachers in classroom management strategies that promote social competence. Teachers report that 16% to 30% of the students in their classrooms pose ongoing problems in terms of social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Moreover, there is substantial evidence showing that the way teachers interact with these students affects their social and emotional outcomes. In a recent study, Head Start centers were randomly assigned to an intervention condition that included the Incredible Years parent training *and* teacher training curricula or to a control condition that received the usual Head Start services. In classrooms where teachers had received the 6-day training workshop, independent observations showed that teachers used more positive teaching strategies and their students were more engaged (a prerequisite for academic learning) and less aggressive than students in control classrooms (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, in press). Another study with children diagnosed with ODD/CD showed that the addition of teacher training to the parent training program significantly enhanced children's school outcomes compared to conditions that only offered parent training (Bierman, 1989; Kazdin, Esveldt, French, & Unis, 1987; Ladd & Mize, 1983; Lochman & Dunn, 1993; Shure, 1994; Webster-Stratton et al., in press). Overall, the research on collaborative approaches to parent- and teachertraining suggests that these interventions can lead to substantial improvements in teachers' and parents' interactions with children and ultimately to children's academic and social competence.

Child social skills and problem-solving training

A third approach to strengthening children's social and emotional competence is to directly train them in social, cognitive, and emotional management skills such as friendly communication, problem solving, and anger management, (eg, Coie & Dodge, 1998; Dodge & Price, 1994). The

theory underlying this approach is the substantial body of research indicating that children with behavior problems show social, cognitive, and behavioral deficits (eg, Coie & Dodge, 1998). Children's emotional deregulation problems have been associated with distinct patterns of responding on a variety of psycho physiological measures compared to typically developing children (Beauchaine, 2001; McBurnett et al., 1993). There is also evidence that some of these bio-behavioral systems are responsive to environmental input (Raine et al., 2001). Moreover, children with a more difficult temperament (e.g., hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention) are at higher risk for particular difficulties with conflict management, social skills, emotional regulation, and making friends. Teaching social and emotional skills to young children who are at risk either because of biological and temperament factors or because of family disadvantage and stressful life factors can result in fewer aggressive responses, inclusion with pro-social peer groups, and more academic success. Because development of these social skills is not automatic, particularly for these higher risk children, more explicit and intentional teaching is needed (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The preschool and early school-age period would seem to be a strategic time to intervene directly with children and an optimal time to facilitate social competence and reduce their aggressive behaviors before these behaviors and reputations develop into permanent patterns.

Summary

For children from birth to three years of age, the development of healthy social emotional skills is the foundation that supports their emerging literacy and numeracy skills. These skills develop within the context of a close, nurturing bond with a primary caregiver – a bond that helps very young children to develop trust, empathy, compassion, and a conscience.

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