

Social and Emotional Development

Learning extends far beyond readin', writin', and 'rithmetic," but historically, the quality of many educational systems has been determined by measures of those skills. Standardized tests and screening devices may well capture the extent to which students – whether incoming kindergartners, fourth-graders, eighth-graders, or high school graduates – can understand and express ideas or compute figures, but many such tests are less able to portray “non-academic” skills that are the keys to success in school and in life. It is imperative that individuals are able to form positive relationships with others, for it is those relationships that give meaning to their experiences in the home, in school, and in the larger community.

In this increasingly globalized and shrinking world, ensuring the healthy social and emotional development of preschoolers is now more critical than ever. Preschool children must learn to be aware of and comfortable with themselves and others and to recognize and manage their emotions. At this age, engaging in respectful two-way interactions with adults is as important as forming positive relationships with peers. Children should demonstrate trust with familiar adults and cooperation with their peers. They must also know when to seek guidance from adults and how to problem-solve with their peers and independently. It is with these skills that children will be best prepared to self-regulate and adapt to new situations.

Dr. Edward Zigler, renowned child development expert and one of the architects of Head Start, writes:

“...cognitive skills are not the sole determinant of how successful a child will be in school or in life. Nor does intelligence develop independently of social-emotional and other systems of human development. Think about the not-so-simple task of learning how to tie a shoe. A child must have the cognitive ability to memorize the steps involved and their order, the fine motor skills and eyesight needed, and the motivation to want to learn the task and to keep trying until he or she succeeds.”

The measure of social and emotional development has long been the “missing piece” of intelligence testing. Alfred Binet, creator of the first modern intelligence test and so-called “father” of IQ testing, cautioned that his scale was designed to identify children who should be placed in special schools where they would receive more individual attention, not to serve as a definitive statement of a child’s intellectual capacity. He, in fact, argued:

“. . . in intelligence, there is a fundamental faculty, the alteration or the lack of which, is of the utmost importance for practical life. This faculty is judgment, otherwise called good sense, practical sense, initiative; the faculty of adapting one's self to circumstances. Indeed the rest of the intellectual faculties seem of little importance in comparison with judgment.”¹

David Wechsler, creator of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (1939), Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (1949), and the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (1967), believed that intelligence is “the global capacity to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with [one’s] environment.”²

These early allusions to social and emotional dimensions of child development were formally presented by Howard Gardner in his groundbreaking work on multiple intelligences. He argued that interpersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people) and intrapersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations) were as important as the cognitive types of intelligence traditionally measured by IQ tests.

That social and emotional skills are integral to the holistic development of children and to their success in pre-school, as well as in later schooling, has been confirmed by many studies.

- In separate studies, researchers established young children’s social status (a proxy for social and emotional skills) in very early grades as highly predictive of social and academic performance in the third grade³ and of school success and mental health adjustment in adolescence.⁴
- Raver found that children who are emotionally well-adjusted have a greater chance of early school success.⁵ In another study, she and Zigler found that children who are able to build positive relationships with others have a greater chance of academic success.⁶

¹ Zigler, E., Gilliam, W. S. and Jones, S.M., 2006 A vision for universal education. New York: Cambridge Press.

² Cited in Kaplan & Saccuzzo, Psychological Testing: Principles, Applications, And Issues (2008) Wadsworth Publishing Company. p. 256

³ Wasik, B.H. 1997. Kindergarten predictors of elementary children’s social and academic performance. In *Influences on and Linkages between Children’s Social and Academic Performance: A Developmental Perspective*. B.H. Wasik, chair. Symposium conducted at the annual meeting for Social Research in Child Development, Washington, D.C.

⁴ Lynch, M. and D. Cicchetti. 1997. Children’s relationships with adults and peers: An examination of elementary and junior high school students. *Journal of School Psychology* 35 (1): 81-99.

⁵ Raver, C.C. 2002. Emotions matter: Making the case for the role of young children’s emotional development for early school readiness. *SRCD Social Policy Report*, XVI (3). Ann Arbor, MI: Society for Research in Child Development. Http: www.srcd.org/spr.html.

⁶ Raver, C.C. & Zigler, E.F. 1997. Social competence: An untapped dimension in evaluating Head Start’s success. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 363-385.

- Joseph and Strain found that problem behaviors decrease and social skills improve when children are taught to understand their own and others' emotions, handle conflicts, problem-solve and to develop relationships with others.⁷ This is particularly important for children whose life circumstances may prompt them to be labeled “at-risk.” Several “risk factors” have been identified as possible inhibitors of a child’s ability to meet society’s standards for behavior, including homelessness, maternal depression, abuse, exposure to violence, and negative values in the school or neighborhood. Children who are living with four or more these factors are more likely to have social-emotional difficulties.⁸
- Reporting on a series of studies of preschoolers, Rubin and Coplan found that children who were non-social or withdrawn during preschool were more likely to suffer from peer rejection, social anxiety, loneliness, depression, and negative self-esteem in later childhood and adolescence. Negative implications for academic success were also suggested.⁹

The impact of healthy social and emotional development remains strong past the preschool years, extending perhaps to adulthood. A study of over 280 programs addressing “social-emotional learning” (SEL) found that students who receive instruction on recognizing and managing emotions, understanding and interacting with others, making good decisions, and behaving ethically and responsibly experienced an increased 11-percentile-point achievement gain in comparison to students who do not participate in SEL programs.¹⁰ Successful leaders in today’s corporate world rely on social and emotional competencies for effective communication, sensitivity, initiative, and interpersonal skills. Economics Nobel Laureate James Heckman notes that the most effective interventions take place during and prior to kindergarten, and that investing in social-emotional skills is a cost-effective approach to increasing the quality and productivity of the workforce through fostering workers’ motivation, perseverance, and self-control.

In an analysis of early childhood education research, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NERL) confirmed the lifelong influence of social and emotional development. The numerous longitudinal studies reviewed in the analysis showed that children who graduated from preschool, as compared to those who did not participate, generally had a greater degree of success in later schooling and in life. (See Chart A.). Indeed, NERL found “it is in the noncognitive realm that the greatest benefits of preschool experience occur.”

⁷ Joseph, G.E. & P.S. Strain. 2003. Comprehensive evidence-based social-emotional curricular for young children: An analysis of efficacious adoption potential. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*. 23 (2):65-76.

⁸ Bowman, B. 2006. School readiness and social-emotional development. In B. Bowman & E.K. Moore (Eds.) *School Readiness and Social Emotional Development: Perspectives on Cultural Diversity*. National Black Child Development Institute, Inc.

⁹ Rubin, K. & R.J. Coplan. 1998. Social and nonsocial play in childhood: An individual differences perspective. In O.N. Saracho & B. Spodek (Eds.) *Multiple perspectives on play in early childhood*. (pp. 144 – 170). Albany: State University of New York Press.

¹⁰ Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dynmicki, A. B., Taylor, R.D., Schellinger, K.B. *The impact of enhancing students social and emotional learning: meta-analysis of child-based universal interventions*. Child Development (in press)

Chart A: Task-related, Social, and Attitudinal Outcomes Associated with Preschool Participation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fewer referrals for remedial classes or special education • less likely to repeat grades • less often absent or sent to detention • greater academic motivation, on-task behavior, and capacity for independent work • more positive attitudes toward school • more frequent high-school graduations or GED completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lower incidents of illegitimate pregnancy, drug abuse, and delinquent acts • higher employment rates and better earnings • fewer arrests and antisocial acts • better relationships with family members • higher incidence of volunteer work • better self-esteem and a greater locus of control
<p>Cotton, K. & Conklin, N.F. 2001. <i>Research on Early Childhood Education. Topical Synthesis #3 of the School Improvement Research Series.</i> Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/topsyn3.html</p>	

It is already clear that social and emotional development is paramount to success; it is becoming clearer that such development requires cultivation. The ability to get along with others, to recognize one’s own strengths, to adapt, and to self-regulate are not merely natural by products of children maturing and interacting with peers; they are a learned skill set. Increasingly, early educators are finding that children are very much in need of this type of learning. Social-emotional development has been cited by many states as the area in which children are least prepared for kindergarten, and the number of kindergarten-aged children who are considered not “ready to learn” has been reported to be as high as fifty percent.¹¹ More troubling still, it has been estimated that between 16 and 30 percent of children entering kindergarten have emotional or behavioral problems that pose ongoing problems to teachers.¹² Researchers have also reported that *forty* percent of children in a Head Start program exhibited problem behaviors (such as kicking or threatening others) at least once a day.

How do early educators address these problems? Bodrova and Leong have suggested that the fourth “r” teachers must attend to – along with readin’, writin’, and ‘rithmetic – is regulation. Self-regulation is of two dimensions: the ability to control one’s impulses (not *grabbing* a coveted toy from a peer’s hands) and the capacity to do something because it’s needed (*asking* to play with the desired toy and then *waiting* one’s turn). According to Bodrova and Leong, self-regulation is used in both social interactions and in thinking, providing the research-based example of having to overcome the desire to focus on the picture of a dog when reading its caption of

¹¹ Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., Pianta, R.C. and Cox, M.J., 2000 *Teacher’s judgement of problems in the transition of kindergarten.* Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15 (2, 147-166).

¹² National Center for Children in Poverty. 2002. Building Services and Systems to Support the Healthy Emotional Development of Children: Promoting the Emotional Well-being of Children. Volume 12: No. 3 NCCP

“cat.” Children’s self-regulation behaviors in the early years are regarded by researchers as more predictive of school achievement in reading and math than their IQ scores.^{13, 14}

Critics seeking to minimize the role of self-regulation in a child’s development may argue that such behavior can only occur when the child is physiologically ready. There lies some truth in this argument, as brain research does indicate that the ability to regulate is tied to the development of the prefrontal cortex, which is also important to controlling one’s emotions and focusing one’s attention.¹⁵ However, it has also been proven that those necessary neural pathways are constructed and strengthened by positive interactions with others.^{16, 17}

One model for promoting the social and emotional development of all children in the classroom extends to teachers the power of positive interactions with others. As depicted in the diagram, the Teaching Pyramid builds upon a base of “positive relationships with children, family, and colleagues.” This model urges teachers to focus on their relationships with children and families and to include developmentally appropriate, child-centered classroom environments that promote children’s developing independence, successful interactions, and engagement in learning. Such nurturing and responsive caregiving will address the social and emotional needs of most children. For those children whose challenging behavior indicates that these “universal practices” are not adequately addressing their social/emotional status, teachers can reframe the problem behavior into a skill-learning opportunity. The desired behavior is modeled for the child, practiced by the child, and maintained in both familiar and new situations.¹⁸



¹³ Bodrova, E. & D Leong. 2008. Developing Self-Regulation in Kindergarten – Can We Keep All the Crickets in the Basket?

¹⁴ Blair, C. 2002. School readiness: Integrating cognition and emotion in a neurobiological conceptualization of children’s functioning at school entry. *American Psychologist* 57 (2):111-27.

¹⁵ Blair, C & RP Bazza. 2007. Relating effortful control, executive function, and false belief understanding to emerging math and literacy ability in kindergarten. *Child Development*. 78 (2):647-63.

¹⁶ Brodrova, E. & D. Leong. 2005. Self-Regulation as a Key to School Readiness

¹⁷ Eisenberger, N.I., Taylor, S.P., Gable, S.L., Hilmert, C.J., Lieberman, M.D., 2007, *Neural pathways link social support to attenuated neuroendocrine stress responses*. *NeuroImage*, 35, 1601-1612.

¹⁸ Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Development through Preschool Education; Crockenberg, S. & Leerkes, E. 2003. Infant negative emotionality, caregiving, and family relationships. In A.C. Crouter & A. Booth (eds.). *Learning to Read the World: Language and Literacy in the First Three Years*. (pp. 557-78). Mahwah, NJ:Erlbaum

Lest educators be overwhelmed by a “fourth r,” it is important to remember that fostering social and emotional development should occur within the context of everyday life. Of course, there are plenty of “teachable moments” – when Ben punches Denzel for stealing the ball, when Taritha blurts out the answer to the question addressed to Grace. But, in a more positive approach, the childhood act of play needs to be taken seriously as a very real avenue to social and emotional development. For it is through “activities in which children – and not adults – set, negotiate, and follow the rules” that pre-schoolers are best able to access one of the important gateways to success: self-regulation.^{19, 20}

¹⁹ Fox, L. & R.H. Lentini: 2006. “You got it!” Teaching social and emotional skills. *Beyond the Journal*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

²⁰ Zigler, E.F., Singer, D.G. and Bishop-Josef, S.J.: 2004 *Children’s play: The roots of reading*. Washington D.C., Zero to three.

Domain: Social and Emotional Development

PreK Benchmark: Children recognize themselves as unique individuals having their own abilities, characteristics, feelings and interests.

Benchmark Indicator:

- Child describes himself/herself using several different characteristics.
- Child identifies self as being part of a family and identifies being connected to at least one significant adult.
- Child demonstrates knowledge of his/her own uniqueness (talent, interests, preferences, gender, culture, etc.).
- Child exhibits self confidence by attempting new tasks independent of prompting or reinforcement
- Child compares and/or contrasts self to others (ex. physical characteristics, preferences, feelings, abilities).
- Child identifies the range of feelings he/she experiences, and that his/her feelings may change over time, as the environment changes, and in response to the behavior of others.
- Child displays accomplishment, contentment, and acknowledgement when completing a task or solving a problem by himself/herself (ex. wants to show a peer or adult).

PreK Benchmark: Children regulate their responses to needs, feelings and events.

Benchmark Indicator:

- Child expresses feelings, needs, opinions and desires in a way that is appropriate to the situation.
- Child appropriately names types of emotions (e.g. frustrated, happy, excited, sad) and associates them with different facial expressions, words and behaviors.
- Child demonstrates an ability to independently modify their behavior in different situations

PreK Benchmark: Children demonstrate and continue to develop positive relationships with significant adults (primary caregivers, teachers and other familiar adults).

Benchmark Indicator:

- Child interacts with significant adults.
- Child seeks guidance from primary caregivers, teachers and other familiar adults.
- Child transitions into unfamiliar setting with the assistance of familiar adults.

PreK Benchmark: Children develop positive relationships with their peers.

Benchmark Indicator:

- Child approaches children already engaged in play.
- Child interacts with other children (e.g. in play, conversation, etc.).
- Child shares materials and toys with other children.
- Child sustains interactions by cooperating, helping, and suggesting new ideas for play.
- Child develops close friendship with one or more peers.
- Child offers support to another child or shows concern when a peer seems distressed.

PreK Benchmark: Children demonstrate pro-social problem solving skills in social interactions.

Benchmark Indicator:

- Child seeks input from others about a problem.
- Child uses multiple pro-social strategies to resolve conflicts (ex. trade, take turns, problem solve).
- Child uses and accepts compromise, with assistance.

PreK Benchmark: Children understand and follow routines and rules.

Benchmark Indicator:

- Child displays an understanding of the purpose of rules.
- Child engages easily in routine activities (ex. story time, snack time, circle time).
- Child uses materials purposefully, safely and respectfully as set by group rules.
- Child applies rules in new, but similar, situations.
- Child demonstrates the ability to create new rules for different situations.

PreK Benchmark: Children adapt to change.

Benchmark Indicator:

- Child easily separates himself/herself from parent or caregiver.
- Child transitions, with minimal support, between routine activities and new or unexpected occurrences.
- Child adjusts behavior as appropriate for different settings and/or events.
- Child uses multiple adaptive strategies to cope with change (e.g. seeking social support from an adult or peer, taking deep breaths, engaging in another activity).