



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: What We Know and Where to Go From Here

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Four-year-olds Darrell and Jamila are pretending to be Bob the Builder®. They have play hammers and screwdrivers and tool belts and shovels even a ride-on bulldozer. They are having fun! Darrell moves the bulldozer to the spot that Jamila is pointing to—they are ready to dig the big hole!! But then things get complicated, changing fast and furiously, as interaction often does. Jamila suddenly decides that he should be the bulldozer driver, and tries to pull Darrell off its seat. At the same time, Jimmy, who had been nearby, runs over and whines that he wants to join in. No way!! Darrell, almost falling off the bulldozer, doesn't want Jimmy to join them—he's too much of a baby. Almost simultaneously, Jamila steps on a plastic "bolt," falls down, and starts to cry. And Tomas, the class bully, approaches, laughing at four-year-olds making believe and crying.

Much more than simple playtime was going on here. Imagine the skills of social-emotional learning (SEL) that are needed to successfully negotiate these interactions! For example, Darrell has to know how to resolve the conflict over the bulldozer, react to Jimmy without hurting his feelings too much, and "handle" Tomas safely. More generally, Darrell needs to learn how to communicate well with others (especially to express his emotions in socially appropriate ways), handle provocation, engage with others positively and build relationships. Taken together, these abilities are vital for how Darrell gets along with others, understands himself, and feels good in his world, both within himself and with other people.

Thus, there are important aspects of SEL required as preschoolers attend to important developmental tasks—in this case, learning to interact with agemates.

If successful in dealing with Jamila, Jimmy, and Tomas, Darrell shows many indicators of such developmentally appropriate SEL—he is beginning to demonstrate (1) self-awareness; (2) self-management; (3) social awareness; (4) responsible decision making; and (5) relationship management (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2002; Payton et al., 2000).

At the same time, there are also important adults in Darrell's life who contribute to his SEL. Will he remember what his father told him about being nice to other kids when Jimmy approaches? Will he see his teacher as a resource when confronted by Tomas, who can be a little scary? If things get very tense with any of the other boys, will Darrell's teacher realize that s/he needs to "have a chat" about the feelings and actions of each? That is, does Darrell have adults—his parents and preschool teacher or daycare providers—who can scaffold his SEL?

We are committed to the promotion of SEL skills like the ones Darrell can demonstrate at such a young age, and we see this promotion as focused on both the children in question and the important adults in their lives. In this chapter, we first define our developmental perspective. Then we describe the developmentally appropriate manifestations of SEL during the preschool period. Next, we review current evidence on how caring adults can foster these SEL skills.

Alongside the specific SEL skills that young children can acquire, and the particular ways in which adults can promote this acquisition, are other aspects of the child and his/her environment, which can either promote or make difficult the acquisition of SEL skills. Thus, we subsequently detail important moderators of preschool SEL—processes of risk and resilience. Finally, following directly from our consideration of these issues, we address how early childhood caregivers can intervene in an organized, systematic way to enhance SEL competencies, prevent SEL deficits, and intervene when SEL deficits already exist.

Developmental perspective on social and emotional learning

All strategies of programming or intervention can be derived from normative theories of child development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Given this bedrock, we view development through an organizational, bio-ecological lens, in which different developmental tasks are central to each age level (Waters & Sroufe, 1983; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). Transitions from one developmental period to another are marked by reorganization around new tasks, but are also based on the accomplishments of the earlier period. Successful mastery of developmental tasks is supported not only by within-child abilities, processes and biological predispositions, but also by the immediate environment of the child (e.g., interactions of the child with his/her parents or with his/her teacher); transactions between elements of the child's immediate environment (e.g., parent-teacher communication about the child); elements outside the child's immediate environment that nevertheless impact it (e.g., demands on parent's time and energy, even depression and other forms of parent psychopathology); and the broader social/political context of the child's world (e.g., welfare policy). Thus, any programs with the goal of promoting young children's SEL must take into account these levels of influence.

Within this organizational perspective, children's emotions, cognition, and behavior are coordinated in ever more complex ways as they mature (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 1999, 2001). Given the nature of brain development, affective development generally precedes cognition and behavior; children experience emotions and react on an emotional level long before they can verbalize their experiences or discern ways to cope (Greenberg & Snell, 1997). An important task of early childhood, then, is to move from primarily lower brain control (where arousal and desire *equal* behavior), to the coordination and self-regulation of emotion, cognition, and behavior via cortical capacities. Such capacities include maintenance of attention, social problem-solving skills, frustration tolerance, and management of affect, all of which are critical to academic, social, and personal outcomes. Language plays a central role as a mediator and tool for establishing cortical control over lower order behavioral and emotional processes (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Nelson, 1996). Thus, it is not merely a truism that the "whole child" is important. SEL is bolstered by each child's cognitive and behavioral skills, and in turn academic success and learning are supported by SEL.

However, as already suggested, these developmental

milestones do not unfold automatically; on the contrary, they are heavily influenced, even at the neuronal level, by environmental inputs throughout early childhood (Greenberg et al., 1999; Greenberg & Snell, 1997; Shore, 1997). That is, there are environmental conditions that nurture and reward the application of these skills of SEL. So, SEL programming can directly affect children, but surely also affects them indirectly, via effects on their caregiving environment. The physical and social environments, as well as relationships with primary caregivers, assume pivotal roles in our thinking about SEL programming. Accordingly, our dual focus in this chapter will be on specific SEL skills that preschoolers can acquire, but also on direct SEL-promoting strategies that can be used by adults in their environment.

At the same time, many other factors within the child, family, classroom, and community may moderate the success of any programming. It is the rule rather than the exception, it seems, that child outcomes are a function of interactions between intended programming and these other factors. We will also consider these processes as they affect child- and adult-targeted SEL programming.

Developmentally appropriate manifestations of social and emotional learning

In the case of preschoolers, SEL skills are organized around the developmental tasks of positive engagement and managing emotional arousal within social interaction, while successfully moving into the world of peers (Howes, 1987; Parker & Gottman, 1989). These tasks are not easy ones for children just entering the peer arena. Nonetheless, successful interaction with age-mates is a crucial predictor of later mental health and well-being, even learning and academic success—beginning during preschool, and continuing during the gradeschool years when peer reputations solidify, and thereafter (Denham & Holt, 1993; Parker & Asher, 1987; Robins & Rutter, 1990).

New empirical research buttresses this view of SEL's importance, for school readiness in particular (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). A number of researchers have shown that children who enter kindergarten with positive SEL profiles also develop positive attitudes about school, successfully adjust to the new experiences there, and demonstrate good grades and achievement (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). More specifically, a wide range of varied SEL indicators, including positive interactions with teachers, positive representations of self derived from attachment relationships, emotion knowledge, emotion regulatory abilities, relationship

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skills, and nonrejected peer status, uniquely predicts academic success (even when other pertinent variables, including earlier academic success, are taken into account; see Carlton, 2000; Howes & Smith, 1995; Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, Ackerman, & Youngstrom, 2001; Jacobsen & Hofmann, 1997; O'Neil, Welsh, Parke, Wang, & Strand, 1997; Pianta, 1997; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Shields, Dickstein, Seifer, Guisti, Magee, & Spritz, 2001). We now describe these crucial preschool SEL skills in fuller detail.

Skills of Social and Emotional Learning

❖ Self-Awareness, Self-Management, and Emotional Expressiveness

Emotional Expressiveness. Self-awareness and emotional expressiveness, especially the recognition and sending of affective messages, are central to SEL. Emotions must be expressed in keeping with one's goals, in accordance with the social context; the goals of self and of others must be coordinated. That is, the self-awareness component of SEL includes experiencing and expressing emotions in a way that is advantageous to moment-to-moment interaction, and to relationships over time. For example, Darrell is well liked, in part, because of his pleasant, happy demeanor.

What, specifically, does the expression of emotions “do for” a child and his/her social group? Most importantly, the experience and expression of emotion signal whether the child or other people need to modify or continue their goal-directed behavior (see Campos, Mumme, Kermoian, & Campos, 1994). Hence, such information can shape the child's own behaviors. An example is happiness — if one boy experiences happiness while playing in the ‘block corner’ with another, he may seek out the other child during another activity, and even ask his mother if the other child can come to their house to play. The experience of joy gives him important information that affects his subsequent behavior. Additionally, emotions are important because they provide social information to other people, and affect others' behaviors. Peers benefit from witnessing other children's expressions of emotion. When a girl's friends witness the social signal of her anger, for example, they know from experience whether their most profitable response would be to fight back or to retreat.

Thus, preschoolers are learning to use emotional communication to express nonverbal messages about a social situation or relationship—for example, giving a hug. They also develop empathic involvement in others' emotions—for example, kissing a baby sister when she falls down and bangs her knee. Further, they display complex social and self-conscious emotions, such as guilt,

pride, shame, and contempt in appropriate contexts. Finally, young children are beginning to realize that a person may feel a certain way “on the inside” but show a different demeanor. In particular, they are learning that the overt expression of socially disapproved feelings may be controlled, while more socially appropriate emotions are expressed—for example, one might feel afraid of an adult visitor, but show no emotion or even a slight smile.

Accumulating evidence suggests that these SEL components contribute to overall success in interacting with one's peers. For example, *positive* affect is important in the initiation and regulation of social exchanges; sharing positive affect may facilitate the formation of friendships, and render one more likable (Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990; Park, Lay, & Ramsay, 1993; Sroufe, Schork, Lawroski, Motti, & LaFreniere, 1984).

Conversely, negative affect, especially anger, can be quite problematic in social interaction (Denham et al., 1990; Lemerise & Dodge, 2000; Rubin & Clark, 1983; Rubin & Daniels-Byrness, 1983). Children who are able to balance their positive and negative emotions: (a) are rated higher by teachers on friendliness and assertiveness, and lower on aggressiveness and sadness; (b) respond more prosocially to peers' emotions; and (c) are seen as more likable by their peers

(Denham, 1986; Denham et al., 1990; Denham, Renwick, & Holt, 1991; Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, et al., 1995, 1996; Sroufe et al., 1984; Strayer, 1980).

In sum, it is easy to envision why children's patterns of self-awareness and emotional expressiveness provide such potent intrapersonal support for, or roadblocks to, interacting with agemates (Campos & Barrett, 1984). A sad or angry child, sitting on the sidelines of a group, with nothing pleasing her, is less able to see, let alone tend to, the emotional needs of others. It is no wonder when her peers flatly assert, “She hits. She bites. She kicked me this morning. I *don't like* her.” Conversely, a happier preschooler is one who can better afford to respond positively to others.

Self-Management. Negative *or* positive emotions can need regulating, when they threaten to overwhelm or need to be amplified. Thus, children learn to retain or enhance those emotions that are relevant and helpful, to attenuate those that are relevant but not helpful, to dampen those that are irrelevant; these skills help them to experience more well-being and maintain satisfying relationships with others. For example, Darrell may know that showing too much anger with Jimmy will hurt this boy's feelings, but showing too *little* angry bravado with Tomas could make him more of a target.

Early in the preschool period, much of this self-management is biobehavioral (e.g., thumbsucking), and often supported by adults; for example, even though

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very upset when a younger playmate grabs all the toys, one can use the caregiver's assistance instead of immediately resorting to aggression. As well, because of increased cognitive ability and control of both their attention and their emotionality (Lewis, Stanger, & Sullivan, 1989; Lewis, Sullivan, & Vasen, 1987), children become more independent in their regulation of emotion during the preschool period.

Beginning to attend preschool or daycare is a particularly important transition that taxes young children's emotion regulatory skills. Preschoolers' attention is riveted on success with their friends in this context. Unlike adults, however, these newly important peers are neither skilled at negotiation, nor able to offer assistance in emotion regulation. At the same time, the social cost of emotional dysregulation is high with both teachers and peers. Because play with peers is replete with conflict, this developmental focus demands emotion regulation; initiating, maintaining, and negotiating play, and earning acceptance, all require preschoolers to "keep the lid on" (Raver, Blackburn, & Bancroft, 1999). Thus, because of the increasing complexity of young children's emotionality and the demands of their social world—with "so much going on" emotionally—some organized emotional gatekeeper must be cultivated.

Perhaps because of these converging pressures, preschoolers gradually begin to use specific coping strategies for self-regulation—problem solving, support seeking, distancing, internalizing, externalizing, distraction, reframing or redefining the problem, cognitive "blunting," and denial. Maternal and teacher reports of constructive modes of such emotion regulatory coping are associated with success with peers (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, et al., 1995).

Joint Contributions Of Self-Awareness, Self-Management, and Emotional Expressiveness. Emotion regulation and expressiveness often operate in concert. Children with specific SEL deficits—those who experience intense negative emotions, and are unable to identify or regulate their expressions of such emotion—are especially likely to suffer difficulties in social relationships (Contreras, Kerns, Weimer, Gentzler, & Tomich, 2000). In contrast, however, even children who are high in negative emotionality are buffered from peer status problems by good emotion regulation skills, which parents and caregivers can teach them (see emotion socialization section below; Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, et al., 1996; Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, et al., 1995, 1996; Eisenberg, Fabes, Shepard, et al., 1997; Murphy, Eisenberg, Fabes, Shepard, & Guthrie, 1999).

❖ **Social Awareness**

Key aspects of the social awareness component of SEL are emotion knowledge, the recognition and identification of feelings in others. Young children who understand emotions better have more positive peer

relations (Denham et al., 1990). For example, the youngster who understands emotions of others should interact more successfully when a friend gets angry with him or her, and the preschooler who can talk about his or her own emotions also is better able to negotiate disputes with friends. Darrell knows that it can be helpful to tell Jamila, "Hey, I had the bulldozer first. Don't be so mean and make me mad."

More specifically, emotion knowledge yields information about emotional expressions and experience in self and others, as well as about events in the environment. From 2 years of age on, young children are interested in emotions. In spontaneous conversations they talk about and reflect upon their own and others' feelings and discuss causes and consequences of their own and others' emotional experiences and expressiveness (Dunn, 1994).

By preschool, most children can infer basic emotions from expressions or situations (Denham, 1986). They tend to have a better understanding of happy situations compared to those that evoke negative emotions (Fabes, Eisenberg, Nyman, & Mischealieu, 1991). Throughout the rest of the preschool period, children come to understand many aspects of the expression and situational elicitation of basic emotions. They gradually come to differentiate among the negative emotions of self and other—for example, realizing that one feels more sad than angry, when receiving "time out" from one's preschool teacher. They also become increasingly capable of using emotion language (Fabes, Eisenberg, McCormick, & Wilson, 1988)—for example, reminiscing about family sadness when a pet died. Furthermore, young children begin to identify other peoples' emotions even when they may differ from their own—for example, knowing that Father's smile as he comes into the house means his workday was satisfactory, and he probably won't yell tonight. Toward the end of this developmental period, they begin to comprehend complex dimensions of emotional experiences, such as the possibility of simultaneous emotions (Denham, 1998).

Although there are developmental progressions in the various aspects of emotion knowledge, with knowledge of expressions and situations preceding other sorts of understanding, there also are marked individual differences in these developments (Dunn, 1994). Children who understand emotions are more prosocially responsive to their peers, and rated as more socially skilled by teachers, and more likable by their peers (Denham, 1986; Denham & Couchoud, 1991; Denham et al., 1990; Strayer, 1980). For example, if a preschooler sees one peer bickering with another, and correctly deduces that the peer suddenly experiences sadness or fear, rather than intensified anger, she may comfort her friend rather than retreat or enter the fray. Interactions with such an emotionally knowledgeable agemate would likely be viewed as satisfying, rendering one more likable. Similarly, teachers are likely to be attuned to the

behavioral evidence of such emotion knowledge—the use of emotion language, the sympathetic reaction—and to evaluate it positively. Emotion knowledge allows a preschooler to react appropriately to others, thus bolstering social relationships.

Recent research by Izard and colleagues (e.g., Izard et al., 2001; Schultz, Izard, Ackerman, & Youngstrom, 2001) corroborates these suggestions. In their study of low-income preschoolers, lack of emotion knowledge predicted both contemporaneous and later teacher reports of overall social functioning (see also Smith, 2001, for similar results predicting peer acceptance). In particular, misattributing anger when other emotions were more correct was related to peer rejection and boys' aggression (Schultz, Izard, & Ackerman, 2000).

❖ Responsible Decision Making

Because thinking and emotion work together in our lives, it is important to address each child's skills in *thinking* about interpersonal interactions, going beyond his or her emotional experience, knowledge, regulation, and expression. Responsible decision making assumes importance as the everyday social interactions of preschoolers increase in frequency and complexity. Young children must learn to analyze social situations, set social goals, and determine effective ways to solve differences that arise between them and their peers. When there is a disagreement or a problem, what can be done (*generation of alternative solutions*)? How do I make a successful solution happen (*means-end thinking*)? How will I know if it works; what solution will work best (*consequential thinking*)? Even preschoolers can begin to learn these important thinking skills, which support their increasingly complex social interaction. Each person involved in interactions that somehow go “wrong”—the actor, the victim, the bystander(s), and the adult caregiver—needs to *understand* how to make interactions go more smoothly for everyone concerned.

Recently the social information processing theory that forms a foundation for training in responsible decision making (Crick & Dodge, 1994)—encoding information about the problem from the social surround, interpreting it, forming goals, selecting and enacting the most favorable response—has expanded to include emotional information and content at every step (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). This union of social information processing and emotions illustrates well our thinking about SEL during the preschool period: Children are constantly attempting to understand their own and others' behavior, and emotions play a role in this understanding, conveying crucial interpersonal information that can guide interaction (Dodge, Laird, Lochman, Zelli, & Conduct Problems Research Group, 2002).

Pertinent here, in the *encoding and interpreting* steps, the child takes in the important information of the other's behavior, emotions, intentions, and the likely

effect of the others' behavior, as well as his/her own arousal level, the intensity of the emotions felt, and his/her relationship with the other. Darrell sees, accurately, that Jamila is annoyed about who is currently in charge of the bulldozer, that Jimmy is a little scared about asking to play, and that Tomas is looking for a chance to act angry and mean—on purpose.

In the next step, *clarification of goals*, the child formulates goals, which are themselves focused arousal states that function to motivate him or her to produce outcomes. When a child cannot regulate her emotion, she may focus on external goals, such as revenge, or may retreat into passivity, neither of which promotes successful interaction. A child who more successfully regulates emotions is more able to focus on relationship-enhancing goals. Darrell *could* act really mad with Jamila, but he will temper this because they are buddies who play together all the time, and he wants this to continue. He really doesn't want to play with babyish Jimmy, but knows that *sometimes* Jimmy is okay, so won't “come down on him too hard.” Finally, he knows that he has to act a bit *macho*-hostile with Tomas, but not too much, or he may regret it.

The child's perception of the other's emotions may also affect goals chosen—for example, a child who showed intense glee at a playmate's distress could render the playmate's revenge or withdrawal more likely. If Tomas acts mean even though Darrell sticks up for himself, Darrell may switch goals and decide that he wants to act really mean back, even to fight.

In the last step, *response generation, evaluation, and decision*, access to and choice of actual behavioral choices differ depending on the child's goals. Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision making complement one another here: A preschooler who can become emotionally regulated after being pushed, for example, feels better but still might not be able to choose how to act, without responsible decision-making skills; if the child is mired in under-regulated anger and hurt, pre-emptive cognitive processing may take place, rather than the effortful processing needed to choose a behavioral response based on SEL. Conversely, a preschooler who usually has good ideas to solve problems may not have them available while extremely emotionally aroused by being pushed.

If Darrell, who seems rather aware of his own emotional processes, can remain calm enough—perhaps via emotion regulatory strategies listed earlier, such as problem-focused regulation or support seeking—he may choose a response that can further his relationships. For example, even though scared of Tomas, Darrell may say something to defuse the bully's nastiness (and help regulate his own emotions by “fixing” the problem), such as, “Quit laughing, Tomas. Do you want to play or not?” Alternatively, he may seek out his teacher to assist in sorting out the difficulties.

❖ Relationship Management

Other relationship skills represent the final component of SEL. These include, for example, making positive overtures to play with others, initiating and maintaining conversations, active listening, cooperating, sharing, taking turns, negotiating, and saying “no” or seeking help when necessary. Extrapolating from our opening story, Darrell may use many such specific skills in the service of getting along with his playmates. He figures out a way to cooperate with Jamila, tries to negotiate some sort of mutually satisfactory solution with Jimmy, and seeks help in dealing with Tomas. Important, distinct abilities such as these enhance the more general strategies of self- and other-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision making.

Fostering social-emotional learning: What adults can do

Thus, young children show SEL strengths (and, sometimes, weaknesses) in self-awareness and self-management, social-awareness, responsible decision making, and other behaviorally specific relationship skills.

Promotion of these SEL skills is central to any programming, be it universal prevention programming, targeted intervention, or special services. Much of the variation in these aspects of the SEL skills accrued by individual children derives from experiences within the family and preschool classroom (Denham, 1998; Hyson, 1994). Important adults in each child’s life have crucial roles in the development of SEL. So, how do we foster SEL that stands children in such good stead as they move into their school years? We now present these roles in detail.

❖ Attachment to Caring Adults

These tasks of SEL are achieved most readily when young children have caring adults to whom they can turn (i.e., one or more secure attachment relationships). During the first years of life, consistently sensitive caregiving performs a number of important functions—including distress relief, and sharing positive affect. Young children who do not know whether “their special person” will give them these things lacks both a secure base for exploration and a secure haven from difficulty and danger. Over time, experiences with caregivers provide the actively social cognizing infant and toddler with fodder to build an “internal working model” of social relationships—“Am I worthy of care?” “Am I important enough to share good times with?” “Is the world a safe place?” “Are people predictable, responsive, and readable?”

Emotional security and its attendant working models form a foundation for SEL (e.g., Laible &

Thompson, 1998; Sroufe et al., 1984). In contrast, emotional insecurity can render a child less willing and able to learn about emotions, and more apt to be “flooded” by aversive emotions. Not only do secure relationships with adults predict concurrent SEL, but they also predict later ability to relate to peers (Howes, 2000). In any SEL classroom-based programming, then, building secure relationships between teacher and child is a key foundation (Pianta, 1997; Pianta & Walsh, 1998). Naturally, promotion of secure parent-child attachment relationships can also be a goal of SEL programming.

Adult caregivers can use their knowledge of attachment in their teaching and interaction with children, by purposefully fostering strong positive relationships with children, and by really *knowing* each child. Knowing each child includes observing her/him

to detect patterns of strengths and weaknesses that can be supported by adults, and promptly attending to individual needs. A perceptive preschool teacher, for example, would know that Jimmy was often on the sidelines of peer play, as he was with Darrell and Jamila. This teacher could make efforts to give Jimmy more one-on-one time to enhance his security

when in her presence.

❖ Positive Guidance

Preschoolers are learning what it means to be part of a group for the very first time. So, along with secure attachment relationships, young children need guidance from adults with regard to the rules for behavior in dyadic and group situations. They need to learn the life skills necessary to function alone or interact responsibly with others, caring for their own and others’ needs.

Hence, young children learn SEL skills best when they have clear rules and limits set for them by the important adults in their lives, when they receive both indirect and direct guidance from them. Indirect guidance focuses on making the children’s environment conducive to positive emotion and behavior (Gartrell, 2003; Greenberg, 1992). In using these techniques, adult caregivers take a proactive stance to maximize not only the smooth workings of each day, but also the children’s development in all domains.

But direct guidance of specific children’s behaviors is necessary, too. The indirect guidance techniques that fit well for all children need to be supplemented by direct guidance techniques tailored to the behaviors and needs of, and one’s relationship with, a specific child. Such direct guidance typically emphasized for parent and early childhood programs includes abundant supervision that flexibly utilizes specific techniques (Bergin & Bergin, 1999; Cataldo, 1987; Greenberg, 1992).

Current theorizing and empirical findings converge on three socialization techniques that promote young

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children's SEL: socializers' emphasis on teaching about emotions and behaviors, modeling positive emotional expression and behaviors, and accepting and helpful reactions to children's emotions and behaviors (Denham, Grant, & Hamada, 2002; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; Tomkins, 1991).

Teaching About Emotions and Behavior

Teachers' and parents' tendencies to discuss children's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, if nested within a warm relationship, assist the child in acquiring SEL competencies. The central aspect of this teaching is providing reasons or *inductive* explanations for events in the child's life, including correction of their mistaken behaviors. Highly inductive guidance strategies coach children to perceive the social consequences of their digressions (e.g., "Johnny will not want to play with you again if you keep taking away his toys") and to empathize or consider another's viewpoint (e.g., "That hurt Toby's feelings—look, he feels sad"). Low inductive strategies, in contrast, assert power over the child without any explanations related to the social environment (e.g., "Give that toy back now, or else").

More specifically, adults who are aware of emotions and talk about them in a differentiated manner (e.g., clarifying, explaining, pointing out responsibility for others' feelings when necessary, but not "preaching") assist children in self-management, as well as in formulating other-awareness (Denham & Auerbach, 1995; Denham & Grout, 1992; Denham, Renwick-DeBardi, & Hewes, 1994; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Gottman et al., 1997; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979). When adults discuss and explain their own and others' emotions, young children also are more capable of empathic involvement with peers (Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994). The same general trend also holds true for low-income, minority children (Garner, Jones, Gaddy, & Rennie, 1997).

Modeling Appropriate Behaviors and Emotions

Children constantly observe the behaviors of adults, and incorporate this learning into their social behavior, often via affective contagion in the case of emotions. Through their emotional expressiveness, adults also teach children what emotions are acceptable in which contexts. Their emotional displays tell children about the emotional significance of differing events, behaviors that may accompany differing emotions, and others' likely reactions. Thus, adults' emotional expressiveness is

associated with children's understanding of emotions as well as their expressive patterns (e.g., Denham & Grout, 1993; Denham, Mitchell-Copeland, Strandberg, Auerbach, & Blair, 1997; Denham, Zoller, et al., 1994).

A mostly positive emotional climate makes emotions more accessible to children. Thus, when children have experience with clear but not overpowering parental emotions, they also may have more experience with empathic involvement with others' emotions (Denham & Grout, 1992, 1993; Denham, Renwick, & Holt, 1991; Denham, Renwick-DeBardi et al., 1994; see also Parke, Cassidy, Burks, Carson, & Boyum, 1992). As well, low-income preschoolers' emotion regulation is facilitated by mothers' appropriate expressiveness (Garner & Spears, 2000).

However, several factors suggest potential negative contributions of adults' expressiveness. Though well-modulated negative emotional expression can contribute to children's understanding of emotion (Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994), frequent and intense negative emotions may disturb children, making SEL more problematic (Denham, 1998). For example, children whose mothers self-report more frequent anger and tension also are less prosocial, and less well liked than children of more positive mothers. Further, adults whose expressiveness is generally limited impart little information about emotions. Finally, positive parental interaction has been found to relate to young children's sociometric status (Cohn, Patterson, & Christopoulos, 1991; Putallaz, 1987); presumably, parents who are emotionally and behaviorally positive are modeled by their young children, who then become preferred playmates.

Contingent Reactions To Children's Emotions and Behavior

Adults' contingent reactions to children's behaviors and emotional displays are also linked to children's SEL. Contingent reactions include behavioral and emotional encouragement or discouragement of specific behaviors and emotions (Tomkins, 1991). More specifically, adults who dismiss emotions may punish children for showing emotions, or ignore the child's emotions in an effort to "make it better" (Denham, Renwick-DeBardi, et al., 1994; Denham, Zoller, et al., 1994). In emotion-evoking contexts, children who experience such adult reactions have more to be upset about—not only their emotion's elicitor, but also the adults' reactions (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Eisenberg, Fabes, Shepard, et al., 1999).

Positive reactions, such as tolerance or comforting, convey a very different message—that emotions are manageable, even useful (Gottman et al., 1997). Good

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emotion coaches accept children's experiences of emotion and their expression of emotions that do not harm others; they empathize with and validate emotions. Emotional moments are seen as opportunities for intimacy (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994; Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, et al., 1996; Eisenberg, Fabes, Shepard, et al., 1999; Gottman et al., 1997).

As well, adults who best promote SEL may use other guidance techniques in response to children's behaviors and emotions, such (a) distracting the child and assisting her/him in choosing substitute behaviors, rather than asserting power; (b) ignoring inappropriate attention-getting behavior when there is no threat of harm to the child, other people, or inanimate objects; and (c) telling the child what *to* do (rather than what *not* to do)—persistently persuading the child toward compliance (Bergin & Bergin, 1999).

These various optimal responses assist children in integrating emotions, cognitions, and behavior—that is, their application of SEL skills in everyday situations (Denham & Grout, 1993; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1979). For example, when mothers show certain benevolent patterns of reactions to children's negative emotions, children are friendlier, showing less egoistic distress and more sympathetic concern to the distress of others. They have warm, empathic, nurturant templates to follow in responding to others' distress (Barnett, King, Howard, & Gino, 1980; Denham, 1993; Denham & Grout, 1993).

The Special Role of Language

Many of these direct techniques take advantage of the preschooler's new sophistication in language. Adults can *talk* to use direct guidance techniques to solve many difficult behavioral episodes with children. They can enunciate clear, simple, essential rules. Before any difficult behaviors occur, adults can state expectations clearly. When an "incident" does arise, language that promotes responsible decision making can be used within direct guidance. For example, if Tomas walked up and destroyed the block constructions that Darrell and Jamila had been making, and even savvy Darrell "lost it," the astute preschool teacher could engage the boys in a dialogue about everybody's feelings, their goals for the interaction, and the behavioral choices that they made. Teacher support in such conversations could make possible more sophisticated SEL processes than the children would be capable of alone.

Summary: How Adults Socialize SEL Skills

Thus, there is a growing body of knowledge regarding the contributions of adults to young children's SEL. Secure attachment and positive behavior management via guidance are two important foundations for SEL that derive from relationships with caring adults. Also,

although cultural values and variations must be acknowledged, a more detailed, generally positive picture emerges of "emotion coaching" and inductive, proactive discipline replete with references to, and explanations of, emotion. These elements will be useful in building adult roles in any successful SEL programming for young children.

Using developmental knowledge: Going from "what is known" to "what is done"

Although normative views of SEL and its promotion are crucially important, the daily context of young children's lives must also be understood. Such understanding is central to accurate perceptions of how particular children have progressed developmentally, and how they will continue to progress. We must understand their specific needs, the processes of risk and resilience that operate in their lives. This view of the child is pivotal in SEL programming.

Each child has unique life circumstances. For many, SEL skills unfold easily, but, in our society with its fragmentation and violence, all children can benefit from clear attention to SEL. Universal programming (i.e., to which all children are exposed) with individualization is the *sine qua non* of such a view. Theoretical and empirical evidence strongly suggests the utility of universal SEL prevention in lowering the incidence and prevalence of related problems (e.g., aggression, depression, anxiety, impulsiveness, antisocial behavior) and increasing the probability of successful management of social-emotional developmental tasks (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

Nonetheless, there are children who, by virtue of compromised development and the presence of risk processes, or the absence of resilience, require more than universal programming. Their behaviors are already challenging themselves and others; they are already taxed to develop age-appropriate SEL skills. These children will benefit from more targeted intervention to assist them and those in their environment to maximize the probability of SEL.

Finally, for those with the most pressing difficulties, integration of the primary prevention, intervention, and mental health services will be necessary. Because we need to be able to respond to such individualized needs, we now turn to a consideration of risk and resilience processes as important moderators of SEL.

Intrapersonal/Contextual/Interpersonal Processes Affecting SEL Development and Programming

A chair sailed through the air, narrowly missing three children playing in the 'house corner' and the classroom aide who was gathering materials for circle time. Tomas had thrown the chair in anger.

Tomas' teachers were desperate for ways to help him improve his behavior, and others', to make the classroom a place where children and teachers could work, learn, and play productively and in peace. Even when teachers work to promote attachment relationships with children, and apply the guidance and socialization techniques just discussed, promoting SEL for some children may be difficult. Conversely, there may be some children whose lives are marked by special processes that enhance our abilities to promote SEL.

As outlined earlier, when we consider processes that facilitate or hinder SEL development and programming, we must include aspects of these children's personal makeup, the immediate environment of the child, transactions between elements of the child's immediate environment, elements outside the child's immediate environment that nevertheless impact it, and the broader social/political context of the child's world.

❖ Risk Processes

Many risk processes can thwart preschoolers' SEL (Davis, 1999; Peth-Pierce, 2000). These include both intrapersonal and interpersonal/contextual risks. Intrapersonal risk processes include gender-related vulnerabilities: Starting from four years of age, boys are more likely than girls to engage in physical aggression and antisocial behavior. In contrast, girls show more continuity of internalizing symptoms even during early childhood. Cognitive deficits also play a role, both those that are more general, such as low IQ and delayed language development, and those that are more specific, such as deficiencies in planning and problem-solving abilities.

Another intrapersonal risk, related to emotional expressiveness, involves temperament. Early temperaments characterized by high levels of negativity when aroused, or behavioral inhibition and shyness, place young children at risk for externalizing and internalizing difficulties, respectively. Temperamentally difficult 3-year-olds show heightened probability of growing up impulsive, unreliable, and antisocial, with more conflicts in their social networks and at work. Temperamentally inhibited 3-year-olds are more likely to be unassertive and depressed, with fewer sources of social support. Lack of attentional control (i.e., attention focusing and shifting), especially in interaction with temperamental negativity, is associated with long-term social dysfunction.

Davis (1999) specifically cites SEL deficits, including emotion regulation, as intrapersonal risk processes. Similarly, lack of relationship skills—e.g., the abilities to recruit support when needed, to be well thought of in the peer group, and to make and sustain friendships—renders the important tasks of grade school more difficult to attain. Children already rejected in kindergarten are the least adjusted to school by sixth grade; peer rejection is one of the strongest predictors of eventual

school dropout (Gagnon, Craig, Tremblay, Zhou, & Vitaro, 1995).

Contextual risk processes also are many and varied. Low socioeconomic status is a marker for multiple risk processes—including lower maternal education, homelessness, unexplained separations from parents, hunger, chronic exposure to violent and otherwise unsafe, chaotic neighborhoods, maltreatment or neglect (Bolger, Patterson, Thompson, Kupersmidt, 1995; Huston, McLoyd, & Garcia Coll, 1994). Persistent family instability, including residence change, lack of daily routines, marital conflict, lack of social support, and other negative life events predict concurrent and later behavior problems, particularly when these stressors are cumulative, and even with other factors controlled (Ackerman, Kogos, Youngstrom, Schoff, & Izard, 1999).

Several interpersonal risk processes map directly onto the important SEL promotion techniques already outlined here. For example, absence of a secure attachment relationship with a caregiver or multiple caregivers leaves a young child at a distinct disadvantage. Such a child has no one person on whom they can count in times of distress, as a fundamental support for learning and growing, and to aid them in forming a positive view of their own worth. Parents' own punitive or inconsistent parenting practices, and/or their own psychopathology, are related to SEL problems among children. Moreover, these risk processes may be especially salient among impoverished children because of their exposure to chronic stress and less-than-optimal emotion socialization (Cutting & Dunn, 1999; Garner & Spears, 2000; Shields et al., 2001), making it especially important to bolster their SEL.

There is some evidence that intrapersonal and interpersonal risks, in combination, are also important; in particular, aspects of emotionality may moderate or mediate the risk/outcome relation (Ackerman, Izard, Schoff, Youngstrom, & Kogos, 1999). For example, the interaction of the child's emotionally negative temperament and parental negative emotion, conflict, or punitiveness may be a particularly potent predictor of behavior problems at the end of the preschool period.

❖ Protective Processes

Thankfully, protective processes also exist, which can moderate the deleterious effects of existent risk factors. These also include intrapersonal and interpersonal/contextual factors, and parallel the enumerated risk processes. Intrapersonally, the confident child with an "easy" temperament, who exhibits relatively high cognitive functioning, is relationally competent enough to have friends (or be able to make them when exposed to peers), has an early history of functioning well with respect to developmental milestones, and has a better chance of also marshaling the component skills of SEL by kindergarten entry.

Regarding interpersonal and contextual protective

processes, social support for the child and parents also can be crucial and adds to the benefits of positive parenting practices. Moreover, parental and other adults' investment and involvement in the child's development are key advantages. Concomitant with positive involvement is the presence of the child's caring relationship with at least one adult; Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, and DeMulder (1997) have found, for example, that when attachment with mother is insecure, a secure attachment relationship with one's preschool teacher may support positive development of SEL.

Summary: Using Information on Risk and Protective Processes

In general, we seek to promote the positive, rather than to prevent disorder; we feel this to be a broader and more basic approach to primary prevention than risk-driven attempts (Elias et al., 1997; see also Battistich, Schaps, Watson, Solomon, & Lewis, 2000). Knowing the child—what risk processes s/he has been exposed to, what protective processes are operative—allows us to not only understand behavior better, but also to individualize treatment, whether it be part of a universal prevention program, targeted intervention, or mental health services. It is to these most pressing practical matters that we now turn.

[Social and emotional learning programming: What is needed? What has been done? Where do we go from here?](#)

We already have some ideas of how to evaluate programs as effective in their promotion of social and emotional foundations for learning (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2002; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Payton et al., 2000; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). For example, in order to maximize programs' effectiveness, they must be of sufficient duration and intensity; change takes time. Further, children need to receive direct intervention if SEL is to be enhanced, and, because children's profiles of SEL strengths and weakness, their patterns of risk and resilience, are extremely heterogeneous, individualization of service delivery is needed. The most effective SEL programs are comprehensive and multifaceted, with SEL, cognitive, and health components for child and family. Finally, initial benefits will diminish in absence of environmental supports. We must not consider that offering SEL programming in preschool "inoculates" children thereafter.

More specifically, Payton et al. (2000) offer the following as criteria for successful SEL programming:

- ❖ Individual lesson plans or activities need to be consistent in providing clear objectives and activities, as well as a clear rationale for their contribution to the overall program goals. That is, teachers and parents need not only to acknowledge the program

goals, but also understand how each lesson furthers these goals. There is nothing more sure to lessen the momentum of programming than a lesson or series of lessons that "don't make sense" to the teacher or parent.

- ❖ SEL skills must be reinforced through infusion across subject areas and by creating opportunities for skill application throughout the day, and rewarding students for using SEL in daily interactions. Effective programs provide structure for the infusion and application of SEL instruction across other subject areas within the school curriculum, and encourage teachers to model SEL skills and to prompt and reinforce students' social and emotionally competent behavior.
- ❖ Quality of program implementation, too often overlooked, must be assessed as it relates to SEL outcomes. Classroom or parenting group implementation assistance must exist, in the form of formal training and technical support, as well as guidelines, procedures, and instruments for planning and monitoring program implementation. We need to be able to see whether programming is proceeding as expected, and if not, why—so that we may modify and improve our programming.
- ❖ Assessment measures need to be included to measure individual mastery of SEL objectives. We need to be able to see whether our programming works! This need raises the issue of the paucity of such assessment tools.

Furthermore, these authors point out another vital aspect of SEL programming, that it is not isolated in the classroom. As noted earlier, all the adults and all the environments, both proximal and distal, in a child's life must be involved in SEL programming, for the most positive, long-lasting results. Hence, Payton et al. (2000) enumerate the following guidelines to ensure such involvement:

- ❖ School-wide coordination is necessary; that is, the program includes structures that promote reinforcement and extension of SEL instruction beyond the classroom and throughout the school.
- ❖ School-family partnerships are similarly crucial. Programming must include strategies to enhance communication between school and families regarding SEL, involving parents in their children's SEL education both at home and at school
- ❖ Finally, school-community partnerships are needed. Community members can be involved in school-based SEL instruction and embrace as an overarching goal.

Early Childhood Social-Emotional Learning: “Best Bets” in Programming

Beginning from these premises, we can already identify several preschool SEL “best bets”; that is, we have ideas about some information about evidence-based programs (e.g., CMHS Promising Programs, 1999; Denham, 2003). Several SEL programs exist that meet many of the above requisites, and have met with some success.

Three programs share some basic similarities in approaches. Denham and Burton’s program (1996; Burton & Denham, 1999) includes teacher training on attachment and guidance issues, lessons on self- and other-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. Children who experienced this universal program, especially those with the largest initial deficits, showed improvements in self-management and relationship skills.

The downward extension of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program to preschoolers, applied in Head Start classrooms (Greenberg et al., 1999, 2001; Greenberg, Kusché, & Mihalic, 1998; Kusché & Greenberg, 1994) includes emphases on self- and other-awareness, as well as self-management and responsible decision making. Early evaluations indicate that program participants improved on emotion knowledge and multiple reporters’ views of their social skills; they also demonstrated decreased internalizing problems (Domitrovich, Cortes, & Greenberg, 2002).

The recently updated Preschool/Kindergarten version of Second Step (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000), a self-named “violence prevention” program, prominently includes promotion of empathy, social problem solving, impulse control, and anger management. An evaluation of the previous version showed that program children’s knowledge of each of these program elements increased, and their problem behaviors decreased (McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yaken, & Childrey, 2000). Izard’s Head Start program (Izard & Bear, 1999), as yet not evaluated, focuses on emotion knowledge and regulation. Other similar programs with promising results are reported by Dubas, Lynch, Galanao, Geller, and Hunt (1998), Sandy and Boardman (2000), and Serna, Nielsen, Lambros, and Forness (2000).

Working from slightly different perspective, the bimodal prevention program for disruptive kindergarten boys, includes social-problem-solving and cognitive-behavioral training for children, thus focusing on responsible decision making and self-management. It also has a significant programming component on parent training in child development and parenting practices, suggestive of positive guidance practices as described here (Tremblay, Pagani-Kurtz, Masse, Vitaro, & Pihl, 1995). This program has shown beneficial effects, in terms of desistance from aggression, delinquency, and other problems, well into adolescence.

Webster-Stratton’s combination of training mothers

about positive guidance and other effective parenting skills, and training their Head Start teachers to work with 4-year-olds regarding social skills, has been evaluated through several replications (Webster-Stratton, 1998; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). Overall, we consider the rudiments of all these programs to include many core elements in ways that foster young children’s SEL, as follows.

❖ Creating Attachment Relationships

The development of a positive, consistent, emotionally supportive relationship with the child is primary (Burton & Denham, 1999; Greenspan, 1992; Mardell, 1992, 1994). Children may actually seek psychological proximity to teachers when their prior attachment history is insecure. Such relationships are promoted through use of “floor time,” a means of building a warmth and intimacy between caregiver and child. Teachers can use this technique during play by observing the child, opening communication, continuing the communication process by following the child’s lead in play, and then by helping the child to expand that play one step further through gestures and words (see also Howes, Galinsky, & Kontos, 1998, for teachers’ training in sensitivity). Burton and Denham (1999) report that the inclusion of these techniques was central to the success of their programming.

❖ Positive Behavior Management: Guidance

For teachers and caregivers of young children who are already demonstrating signs of SEL deficits, behavior management must be an integral portion of SEL programming. Of course, even children who are showing no difficulties need guidance. Fortunately, positive guidance can also further the goals of SEL (Galambos, 1978). Bergin and Bergin (1999) advocate the use of persistent persuasion until the child complies, without increasing the level of power assertion or using coercive threats. The overuse of power assertion can damage adult-child relationships and fails to promote the child’s internal motivation. In fact, power assertive behavior management can actually teach the child aggression and raise the expectancy level for coercion.

In the use of persistent persuasion, coercive elements are veiled, if not nonexistent. Such ambiguity increases the child’s tendency to attribute their compliance to self-motivation. The affective component of such guidance is also quite important. Committed compliance is rooted in long-term relational qualities, so that some anxiety inducement, in the context of the warm relationship, motivates the child to reciprocate by complying. Furthermore, self-assertion and negotiation on the child’s part are not antithetical to compliance. Such behavior management also takes some time to carry out, giving the child time to regain self-control. Along with persistent persuasion, inductive guidance that focuses on the

consequences of the child's behaviors on others, particularly others' feelings, is very effective. Such inductive guidance techniques—explaining to the child why one is pleased or displeased with their behavior, with feeling—are associated with SEL (Berkowitz & Grych, 2000).

As a central component of their programming, Denham and Burton (1996) trained preschool daycare providers in positive guidance techniques. Webster-Stratton (1998) and Tremblay et al. (1995) also implement similar concepts in parent training to increase preschoolers' SEL.

❖ **Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Self-Management**

Young children may not have been exposed to language to express their feelings. Without emotion language and understanding, no distancing occurs between their own feelings and their actions. Thinking about the effect of one's actions upon others also requires that the child understand her feelings. Emotion knowledge is, then, the next component of "best bet" programs. With such knowledge, children have a vehicle with which to regulate emotions by attaching a label to feelings inside and bringing feelings to consciousness. If a child can recognize her own feelings, she also can begin to empathize with feelings seen in others. Programming emphasizing enjoyable didactic activities in understanding and labeling emotions provides the child with the exposure to feeling words, ability to use words to label affect in themselves and in others, and recognition that actions can cause emotions (Denham, 1998; Denham & Burton, 1996; Izard & Bear, 1999; Jensen & Wells, 1979). Second Step, as well as Greenberg and Domitrovich's downward extension of the PATHS curriculum, and Izard's Head Start curriculum, all include numerous lessons involving aspects of SEL skills.

In both Denham and Burton's and Greenberg's programs, children learn a validated method of controlling negative feelings called the Turtle Technique (Robin, Schneider, & Dolnick, 1976; somewhat similar techniques are used in Second Step and Izard's Head Start programming). In this technique, children are encouraged to imagine that they are turtles, retreating into their shells when they feel scared or hurt or angry actually pulling their arms close to their bodies, putting their heads down, and closing their eyes. They then relax their muscles to cope with emotional tension. This gives them time to regulate their feelings, reflect on them, and decide how they will react to the cause of these feelings. Qualitative results in Burton and Denham (1998) suggest that this is indeed a very powerful technique.

❖ **Responsible Decision Making**

Because understanding and regulating affect are such important parts of social relationships, experience in

talking through affect-laden social problems and concerns also enhances the child's ability to solve problems that occur with peers. Thus, the next component of "best bet" programs—including Denham and Burton's program, Head Start PATHS, and Second Step—is promoting responsible decision-making and social interaction skills (Shure, 1990). This approach improves an individual's ability to think through interpersonal conflicts; the learner is guided to develop the habit of generating multiple options, evaluating these options, and using systematic means to reach their goal. Denham and Almeida's (1987) meta-analysis of then-extant evaluation research on SEL promoting programs revealed that these programs do result in successful skills acquisition in preschool-aged children. Moreover, on average, children's behavior changes in a prosocial direction through such programs.

Individualization Of Program Techniques

As repeatedly reiterated here, the complex interplay of factors that influence development is unique to each child. Accordingly, it is important for optimum transfer, and efficient use of time and resources, for work with each child to be individualized in a way that utilizes all program components, but tailors information from each to meet the child's particular needs. Teachers can be taught to investigate the history of the child and use that information to facilitate effective interactions. They can tailor the use of floor time, the "turtle technique", and "dialoguing" to work one-on-one through emotional and social events with a child.

In particular, the technique of dialoguing involves identifying the problem "in vivo" (e.g., two children who want to play with the same toy), talking about feelings of all parties related to the problem, generating alternative solutions to the problem, associating likely consequences to each solution, and then choosing an appropriate action. Denham and Almeida (1987) found the use of dialoguing to be related to success of SEL programs. The critical aspect is to include discussion of feelings in the dialoguing process, both one's own and those of the other parties involved (although if young children are *too* upset, immediate discussions may not work). Techniques also can be expanded to include emphasis on prosocial solutions with aggressive children (i.e., because aggressive children can sometimes come up with *many* aggressive solutions to social problems, to show children with such SEL deficits that not just any solution to a problem is called for, but that prosocial solutions are preferable in both the short and long run).

❖ **Infusion Throughout the Early Childhood Classroom Day**

SEL programming is not an isolated entity. Other programs or program components also may have salutary effects on SEL. For example, several large-scale early

childhood education programs include some, but not all, aspects deemed crucial for SEL programs (e.g., High/Scope, Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997; see also Greenwood, Model, Rydell, & Chiesa, 1996; Mendel, 2000). Further, several well-known constructivist early childhood models have much to offer in the way of infusing a positive climate, and a socio-moral atmosphere throughout the curriculum (DeVries, Reese-Learned, & Morgan, 1991; Marcon, 1993, 1999; Stipek, Daniels, Galuzzo, & Milburn, 1992). Some of these elements should be incorporated into comprehensive SEL programs; for example Denham and Burton's (1996) program was nested within the overarching High/Scope curriculum.

Conversely, SEL concepts should be generalized across children's daily activities and integrated with other "themes" of learning deemed important for children's development. SEL can be infused into all parts of a preschooler's day, into almost every corner of the curriculum, and into the most mundane activity at home, since many of the practices involve the adult appropriately labeling, discussing, and scaffolding/working through the child's emotions during everyday interactions and activities. SEL "teachable moments" abound! For example, children benefit from learning how to express their feelings appropriately during not only center time play, but during snack time, waiting in line, and transitions from one activity to another. SEL also can be integrated into themes such as nutrition (e.g., some foods are good for us and make us feel happy), and safety (e.g., wearing a safety belt in the car makes one feel safe). Finally, SEL programming is not restricted to "lessons" or didactic aids, such as displaying pictures of different feeling faces and situations that elicit feelings throughout the classroom; teachers also can create environmental spaces that support SEL (e.g., "peace" table or "feelings" corner, where children can go to calm down or have quiet time to reflect on their feelings).

❖ Classroom Climate, School Ecology, And Neighborhood Context

Classroom climate, school ecology and neighborhood issues also are very important to the success of SEL programming (e.g., Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993; Frey et al., 2000; Hawkins, Catalano, Morrison, O'Donnell, Abbot, & Day, 1992). Preschool programs can become "caring communities," in which affective bonds develop between the child and the community, promoting acceptance and internalization of community mores (Battistich et al., 2000). But, because there are few empirical evaluations of successful preschool programs and thus few accounts of the role of early childhood classroom climate, school ecology, and neighborhood context in program implementation and effectiveness, much of the information related to these contextual issues is in the form of anecdotal "lessons from the field" (Yoshikawa & Knitzer, 1997). For

example, creators of the Head Start PATHS and Second Step programs for preschool children have identified criteria that they believe are important for SEL at the classroom, school, and community levels.

First, interventions should be designed for to provide a safe and supportive school climate that fosters SEL. This includes training of teachers and all key adults in the school environment with whom children have contact (e.g., center directors, bus drivers, teachers' aides), and parents, in positive emotion coaching strategies (Elias et al., 1997). Training teachers and parents to provide greater opportunities for children to be active participants in the classroom and the family, and to be recognized for positive involvement, along with providing children with SEL skills, should strengthen children's bonds of commitment to education, as well as attachment to family and school (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). In turn, stronger bonding to school and family improves children's academic achievement, and to decrease the likelihood that they engage in behaviors disapproved of by school personnel and family members.

❖ School-Family Partnerships

School-family partnerships produce more positive outcomes for children than school programs or family programs conducted in isolation (Epstein, 1996; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). When parents and teachers work together, programming is enhanced, school climate can be more focused on positive SEL, and it is easier to coordinate community resources—an auspicious fusion of effects obtain (Webster-Stratton et al., 2001). However, such an approach needs systematic inclusion and evaluation in early childhood SEL programs (e.g., Tremblay et al., 1995). At this point, most extant programs address compliance and oppositionality problems common in families with preschool children.

Several have very salutary effects. For example, mothers who experienced Webster-Stratton's program, in comparison with those who did not, made fewer critical remarks and commands, used less harsh discipline and more positive parenting, and were more involved in their children's education. Their children, also exposed to a program to strengthen their prosocial and social skills, exhibited fewer conduct problems, less noncompliance, less negative affect, and more positive affect. These improvements were largely maintained after one year.

In this program, home-school consistency and parent involvement in school programming are also promoted. Training includes a 4-day workshop for parents, with ongoing weekly supervision, with vignettes on video, role-plays, activities and stories, and homework. Implementation of the parent training program is tracked via weekly checklists of group process, parent interest, and participation. Importantly, such school-parent partnerships have been effective specifically

in strengthening parents experiencing multiple risk processes (Catalano, Haggerty, & Gainey, 2002).

Parent training centering on even more specifically on all aspects of preschoolers' SEL is also necessary, and requires more scientific development. One of the recent efforts in this regard includes "The Heart of Parenting" (Gottman & Declaire, 1997). Other books on the mass market hold possibilities for kernels of "emotion coaching" information that could be tailored.

Summary. The active engagement of educators, parents, and community leaders can provide opportunities to facilitate SEL across many domains of the child's environment, such as the home environment, a domain that is particularly relevant for preschool children whose social world is only beginning to expand. In summary, we need to reach beyond the classroom to influence the lives of all of the adults with whom children have contact.

❖ The Importance of Culture

In maximizing the success of school-family and school-community partnerships, we must not overlook the role of culture. Culture provides young children with a sense of identity and a frame of reference that helps them understand their worlds; every interaction between young children and others is a cultural experience. When young children experience programming that may be cognitively, linguistically, and emotionally disconnected from the language and culture of their home, it is the responsibility of caregivers to develop the skills and understandings to work with children and families in a culturally responsive manner. This injunction requires professional preparation and development in the areas of culture, language, and diversity (Tabors, 1997), as well as understanding of one's own unique cultural lens (Sánchez, 1999).

Adults working with culturally and linguistically diverse young children and families are often unaware that they bring their own cultural lens that is unique and plays a role in their interactions with others (Ballenger, 1999; Garcia Coll & Magnusson, 2000). This lack of awareness is particularly critical when practitioners apply their own cultural lens to assess, assign meaning, or interpret SEL of diverse young children, thus failing to account for roles, rituals, and expectations which may be different from their own (de Melendez & Ostertag, 1997; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). We can seriously misunderstand the SEL needs of the child if we do not understand the child's culture and our own cultural perspective (Hudley, 2001).

Specifically, we must guard against inappropriate or intrusive programming based on faulty assumptions, such as: (1) the caregiving environment necessarily requires modification, and (2) the family and the program necessarily agree on desired outcomes. Thus, programming approaches must also be culturally

relevant, empowering children within their unique cultural contexts. This tenet includes the possibility that certain definitions of SEL may be unique to the child's home culture.

Therefore, to better know a child, practitioners must get to know the family. Building relationships with families can provide practitioners with the insight needed to understand the decisions, behaviors, and values exhibited by the child and their family (Thorp, 1997). Family activities show an outsider how that family transmits knowledge, and can serve as resources to tap into children's SEL while simultaneously addressing cultural and linguistic continuity for young children (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Family routines, mother's games and lullabies, family stories, and the family's way of interacting and questioning could be sources to help caregivers to provide emotional continuity in a culturally responsive and caring manner (Sánchez, 1999; Sánchez & Thorp, 1998).

❖ Promoting Reflective Training, Supervision, And Consultation

Reflective methods also have emerged as vital components to the success of the program documented in Burton and Denham (1998; Denham & Burton, 1996). When rapport is achieved between SEL consultants and teachers, teachers are hungry for someone to observe in their classrooms, someone who cares and understands, and is knowledgeable, someone who will listen and engage them in a true dialogue. For example, Fantuzzo, Childs, Stevenson, Coolahan, Ginsburg, Gay, Debnam, & Watson (1996) showed that collaborative training, in which Head Start teachers and parent volunteers were involved conjointly in experiential training that included receiving guided practice and feedback from exemplary peers, resulted in teachers' and parents' greater levels of active involvement in and satisfaction with the training, as well as significantly greater levels of parent classroom activity. With respect to adult-child classroom interactions, teachers demonstrated significantly more positive initiations and praise with children. Active investment in the process yields positive results for all involved. Truly collaborative alliances with teachers, other school personnel, and preventionists ensure that everyone is "on the same page" (Hunter, Elias, & Norris, 2001).

Integration and conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted to give a full overview of the importance of SEL during early childhood—from attachment, guidance, and positive socialization, to self- and other- awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. Given the centrality of these components of SEL to concurrent success in the early years, but perhaps even more importantly, to later academic, interpersonal, and

intrapersonal success, it behooves us to consider universal and targeted prevention programming in this area. We have outlined promising research-based evidence for such programming, from specific SEL instructional techniques, to considerations of individualization, infusion into the fabric of the entire early childhood program, classroom climate, school ecology, and family-school partnerships, cultural sensitivity, and reflective supervision. We consider also that better assessment of SEL skills is needed for the early childhood years (see Denham & Burton, in press, for a fuller treatment of this issue).

Thus, many kernels of effective SEL programming in early childhood have been introduced. Making these possibilities explicit within early childhood education, rather than implicit, is a priority that we can no longer postpone. Although there is evidence-based research supporting the importance of early SEL, as well as growing support for specific SEL practices during early childhood, more focused attention on successful SEL programming is needed to advance sound practice that enhances children's success in schools and life. As well, we need to take Ramey and Ramey's (1998) admonition seriously, and seamlessly unite preschool SEL programming with SEL programming for older children, both in school and family. Where will Darrell, Jamila, Jimmy, and Tomas be at age 15? If we provide them with continued SEL-enhancing programming and adult support in home, school, and community, the results will be well worth our efforts.

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