A Foundation to Build Upon

Social-Emotional Development in the Early Learning Classroom

hatch
The Early Learning Experts

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Not that long ago, computers and computer games were seen as solitary activities that did little to facilitate social growth. However, today computer use for both adults and children is seen as a collaborative effort that can encourage a sense of community and cooperation. In fact, children have as much cooperative play time at computer centers as they do at building block centers in their classrooms.¹

It is during a child’s early years that they begin gaining a sense of self; they begin shaping their permanent attitudes and behaviors through observation as well as adult and peer interactions. Children learn self-control and self-regulation, as well as a whole host of other skills. It is becoming increasingly obvious that this type of learning is just as important as ABCs and 123s.

Research shows that children who have poor self-control as preschoolers are three times as likely to have problems as young adults.²

**How do you go from outbursts in the classroom to an outgoing, life-long learner? It’s time to bring a new set of building blocks to the classroom.**

Teachers can help their students master essential social-emotional skills through a combination of **teacher modeling, collaborative play, and continuous progress monitoring**. With these social-emotional skills under their belt, children will be ready to take on Kindergarten—then the world!

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If a child doesn’t know how to read, we teach.  
If a child doesn’t know how to swim, we teach.  
If a child doesn’t know how to multiply, we teach.  
If a child doesn’t know how to behave...

**Why can’t we finish the last sentence as automatically as we do the others?**
Social-Emotional Learning & Development

Social-Emotional skills like self-control, paying attention, finishing tasks, recognizing others’ emotions, taking turns, cooperating, compromising, respecting others and self-regulation are critical to positive development in early learning.

From birth to age 5, Social-Emotional Development is the developing capacity of a child to regulate and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways, exploring their environment and learning—all in the context of family, community and culture. It includes a child’s feelings about themselves and others, and an ability to understand the perspective and feelings of others. Additionally, it is the understanding of the skills required to get along well in a group.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process of learning important life skills which include how to deal with oneself, how to work with others, how to establish and maintain adult and peer relationships, and how to work in an effective manner.

Cognition and emotion are not opposing qualities and one is not more important than the other. What is important is one’s ability to successfully manage both.
The Problem

Young children who behave unsociably do not participate as often in classroom activities and are less accepted by peers and teachers. This begins at an early age. In preschool, these children are provided less instruction and positive feedback from their teachers, do not like school as much, learn less, and come to school less often. This compromises their success in school as they show less success on academic tasks, are more likely to be retained in the early grades, and are more likely to drop out and be involved in delinquency once older. Academic performance in first grade, over and above cognitive skills and family backgrounds, is predicted by young children’s competence in the emotional, social, and behavioral realms (such as higher levels of self-control and lower levels of acting out).³

Skills that facilitate success in early schooling include children being able to identify emotions accurately in themselves and others.

Children with Poor Social-Emotional Skills Are Less Welcome In the Classroom

In a study of nearly 4,000 randomly-selected state-funded prekindergarten classes, 10% of teachers reported at least one expulsion during the past 12 months. A rate of almost 7 expulsions per 1,000 preschoolers was reported, three times greater than the national rate of expulsion for K-12.⁴ This indicates clearly that teachers and providers are likely to find that while some children are doing very well, other children are struggling with a range of emotional and behavioral difficulties that make attending preschool very challenging for both themselves and their teachers.⁵
The Trouble with the Transition

Many kindergarten teachers report that, due to a basic lack of social and emotional competencies, half or more of their students have a number of problems transitioning to school.⁵

> 46% of Kindergarten teachers report that children cannot follow directions,

> 30% of Kindergarten students cannot work independently or in a group, and

> 20% cannot communicate well with peers and teachers.

Preschool teachers are faced with a considerable number of young children (between 16 and 32 percent) who exhibit emotional and behavioral problems that compromise early school success.⁷ ⁸

Social-Emotional School Readiness

Research tells us that the transition to school in the early years is more likely to be positive if a child is socially and emotionally prepared. Social interaction with others (both adults and peers) is a central mechanism for learning in school. This makes it imperative that children have a strong social and emotional foundation. This foundation includes:

> Ability to concentrate on and persist at challenging tasks

> Confidence and friendliness with peers

> Communicate emotions appropriately and effectively

Children’s school experiences are more positive and productive when they have a sense of personal wellbeing grounded in stable, caring relationships in their early lives. A solid base of emotional security and social competence enables children to participate fully in learning experiences and form good relationships with teachers and peers. Key social skills are:

> Respecting the rights of others,

> Relating to peers without being submissive or overbearing,

> Being willing to give and receive support, and

> Treating others as one would like to be treated.

To the extent that children develop these social skills and attitudes, they function better in the school setting.
Placing the Cornerstone

A substantial number of children are in danger of school failure, beginning in preschool and continuing throughout their schooling experience due to issues connected with problems in their early social and emotional skills. Researchers, policymakers, and educators all stress the importance of implementing effective interventions early.

Children who fail to gain these social-emotional competencies during preschool more often experience learning problems and academic delays later in their academic career.

The Role of Self-Control & Self-Regulation

Social-Emotional skills protect children against risk and promote a healthy mental state. A strong indicator for later success is how much self-control and self-regulation children can exhibit at an early stage. No child is born with either trait, but just as we make time for physical activity, time should be given to “exercise” these skills.

Self-Control: emotional and behavioral regulation that increases with age and practice

Self-Regulation: guiding oneself through metacognition, strategic action and motivation to learn
Social-Emotional Milestones

Preschool teachers are faced with an incredible challenge. Even within the confined age groups of children in prekindergarten, individual children can be at any number of key developmental points. Here is a brief overview of the developmental milestones children should be reaching immediately before and during preschool.⁹

2-3 Years:
- Children want to explore! However, they still struggle with self-regulation.
- Children become more assertive. Expect to hear “No!”
- Exploration of emotions leads to sudden shifts in mood.
- More likely to “parallel play” than actively engage peers.

3-4 Years:
- Can follow simple directions.
- Shows more interest in imaginative play.
- Following simple rules is easier.
- Can identify multiple emotions, but typically displays just one at a time.

4-5 Years:
- Begins forming long-term friendships
- Advancing through stages of morality: what is fair? What’s “good” or “bad” behavior?
- Able to follow rules and stay on task
- Can show a blend of emotions

Engaging in solitary activities near other children, but not actively playing with others
You Can Promote Positive Social-Emotional Behavior in the Classroom

Knowing how important the development of positive social-emotional behavior is, it can be a daunting prospect to actively try to manage the classroom experience. The very idea of managing this kind of learning is still a relatively new concept to some educators.

To Do:

- Here are a few ways that you can create an environment that fosters Social-Emotional growth.
- **1) Create an environment that promotes a positive feeling about coming to school.**
- **2) Cultivate a classroom that promotes child engagement and collaborative play.**
- **3) Focus on teaching children expectations and what to do in a variety of scenarios.**
- **4) Provide opportunities for children to practice their SEL skills in a variety of contexts and environments.**
What Does Research Show Works in Early Learning Classrooms?

- Appropriate technology which supports skill development in all domains.
- Progress monitoring at least 2-4 times a year to guide instruction.
- Varying group size with instruction lasting 7-10 minutes with a focus on a specific skill.
- Literacy & Math focus presented in a systematic way.
- Attention to the learning needs of all children.
10 Critical Skills

When children master these 10 essential SEL skills, they will be better able to manage their cognitive skills.

1) **Ability to control attention**: to focus long enough to hear and comprehend instructions

2) **Positive approach to learning**: develops excitement around learning and coming to school

3) **Self Efficacy**: belief that personal goals can be accomplished

4) **Self-Control**: ability to manage behavior and emotions

5) **Self-Regulation**: ability to map out a personal plan of action

6) **Awareness of Feelings**: communication about one’s own emotions and emotions of others

7) **Ability to Identify a Range of Emotions**: can name both simple and more complex emotions

8) **Regulate the Intensity of Emotions**: neither overreact nor underreact to a given situation

9) **Positive Group Participation**: cooperates and contributes to group activities

10) **Pro-Social Behaviors and Communication**: approach situations in a manner that encourages positive interactions, feedback and results

Practice Makes Permanent

While any type of exercise, physical or mental, can be difficult, the results are always worth it. Children who enter kindergarten with a strong foundation of behavioral skills have a better sense of self. When set goals are completed under supportive monitoring and with the appropriate encouragement, children feel increased confidence, competence, and commitment.
It’s Nice to Have a Partner

Educators don’t operate in a vacuum. It can be difficult reconciling what is (and is not) taught at home with what is shown to be most beneficial for students. With 80% of 4-year-olds receiving out-of-home care, it is especially important to work with parents to reinforce what is being taught in class.

Tips from the Teacher: Implementing SEL at Home

1) Provide Explicit Instructions: “Please go wash your hands and go to the kitchen—it’s time for dinner.” vs. “Get ready for dinner.”

2) Model Skills: Play rule-based games. Read the directions beforehand and follow them carefully. Acknowledge when rules are not being followed.

3) Discussion of Relevant Situations: Talk about emotions—both ones that the child is experiencing and ones she might be observing elsewhere.

4) Provide Opportunities for Practice with Recognition: Set small household goals. Identify what steps need to be taken to achieve each goal before starting and what those steps look like. Example: toys should be picked up every day before bed time. That means incorporating clean-up into playtime by ending five minutes early to put all the toys back in the toy box.

5) Give Feedback and Encourage Reflection: Acknowledge when your child has done something correctly, or steer him in the right direction when behavior could use improvement. Ask him why he thinks something went well, or didn’t go as planned.
Getting the Most by Measuring

In an early childhood classroom, growth happens so quickly that it can be measured in hours, not days. It’s both exciting for a parent to see the rapid academic and behavioral growth of a child throughout the year, and a necessary educational tool for teachers to identify individual strengths and problem areas. Progress monitoring at the outset may seem challenging and time consuming—but with an established routine and a few technological helpers, it becomes a breeze.

The Power of Portfolios

Portfolios are a valuable progress monitoring tool. A portfolio “should be a celebration of the child’s unique abilities, achievements and progress, displayed through authentic samples”.11

Progress monitoring isn’t only about being able to show a “Before” and “After,” but about documenting the steps in between. Showing evidence of behavioral skills or challenges is more difficult than providing evidence of cognitive skills through examples of more traditional classroom activities. Teachers can’t have eyes and ears everywhere, and trying to remember specific instances of growth after the fact can be challenging. The best solution is to document authentic interactions through audio and video recordings. Having video or audio available lets teachers go back to review and evaluate authentic data.

Progress Monitoring in 5 Steps

1) Determine current performance areas for each child across all fields.
2) Identify goals for learning.
3) Measure performance regularly. These measures can include classroom assignments, photos, videos, or audio recordings.
4) Compare expected and actual rates of learning.
5) Adjust instruction accordingly.

WePlaySmart by Hatch records audio of children’s voices during play, capturing authentic interactions with peers. A teacher can include this evidence in a child’s digital portfolios to demonstrate social-emotional learning over time and to support discussions with parents.
It’s Your Turn!

Technology that is integrated with curriculum goals and activities “does not disrupt ongoing play, but rather facilitates extensive positive social interaction, cooperation, and helping behaviors.”

WePlaySmart by Hatch develops social-emotional skills by providing opportunities to take control of situations and **make choices**. As they play the games, children are encouraged to try many solutions, especially those that involve **cooperation and collaboration**.

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**Developmentally appropriate technology supports young children’s social-emotional development by providing rich opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.**

As children play more than **275 research-based, scaffolded games designed for Pre-K**, they build cognitive skills as their interactions build social-emotional skills. Children guide the outcomes of the games and receive feedback while playing.

As these peer interactions occur, children practice **considering and appropriately reacting** to their peers’ viewpoints. Practice shows them that their effect is a natural occurrence that they can control either through their actions or feelings.

Authentic data and a personalized photo login make WePlaySmart by Hatch an appropriate progress monitoring tool. Audio instructions guide children so that they may access games independent of teacher help. As a result, the recorded conversations reflect **authentic interactions**. Every time children log in to play, the table captures conversations that teachers may replay to monitor the child’s development or to **share with parents** during conferences.
Teacher Tools

WePlaySmart by Hatch has built in, automated progress monitoring that records up to 35 children’s interactions at the table and then offers a set of assessment questionnaires for teachers to determine social-emotional competency. By periodically recording the interactions of the children as they are playing, the system stores a rich library of authentic data for each child that the teacher can use throughout the school year.

Authentic data is made available in fully-formatted reports. Teachers can listen to an audio clip and evaluate the child on a scale from “emerging” to “shows strongly” for social-emotional skills within the fundamental skill areas.

WePlaySmart by Hatch features more than 275 research-based, developmentally appropriate activities designed specifically for early learners. These activities engage children in core cognitive literacy and math skills while helping children acquire the social-emotional and cognitive skills needed to be successful. The photo login system enables authentic data collection for each child and provides progress monitoring reports. > Learn More
Sources


About Hatch
Early Learning Technology & Classroom Essentials
From Interactive Displays and Content to Tablets—Hatch® is the leader in technology solutions for early learners through innovation and forward-thinking ideas. Our cutting-edge technology combines child-appropriate hardware with research-based content to engage children and empower teachers with progress monitoring tools. Hatch is the most widely used early education technology provider nationwide.

If you’re unsure what technology is appropriate for your classroom, check out this resource from the Hatch Library.

Research-based Educational Technology that Aligns with National Standards

Interactive Whiteboards & Content Packages with Lesson Planning Tools

Revolutionary Computers & Mobile Devices that Monitor Child Progress

Multi-touch Tables & Content Packages that Promote Cooperative Play