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## Chapter 1

### **Social and Emotional Education: Core concepts and practices**

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There is a growing body of research and practice which underscores what parents and teachers have long known: that learning how to read ourselves--and the reactions of others--is as important as learning how to read words and numbers. This volumes chapters and other recent reports (Cohen, 1999a; Elias et al., 1997) have established that social emotional literacy reduces violence, enhances adaptive capacities, and provides the foundation for learning and healthy development.

To achieve our educational goals, we need to promote social emotional literacy as well the three “Rs”. The purpose of education is to enable children to be life-long learners and effective citizens. Historically, elementary school educators have been particularly attuned to the fact that social emotional learning provides the platform for learning to learn and the development of self reflection, responsibility, caring, cooperation and effective problem solving. And, over the past two decades, we have deepened our understanding of how essential these capacities are and of how we can more effectively integrate them into the academic setting.

Social and emotional education refers to the process and methods we use to promote social emotional competencies. Although I suggest that the capacity to “read” ourselves and others is the foundation for social emotional learning (just as the capacity to decode phonemes is the foundation for language learning), competence and learning in this area refers to a broader set of knowledge and skills. Social and emotional competence measures the ability to understand, process, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of our lives. The degree to which we are able to do so is predictive of life satisfaction and productivity, whereas grades and SAT scores, by themselves, are not (Goleman, 1995; Heath, 1991; Valliant, 1977)! We have also learned that schools can and need to be a forum in which social emotional understanding and related skills are taught. There is a growing consensus, then, that effective social emotional education needs to become an integrated part of the curriculum, pre-K through 12 grade (Comer, 1997; Elias et al., 1997; Gardner, Feldman, & Krechevsky, 1998; Goleman, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Noddings, 1992).

It is abundantly clear to those who work with young children that how children feel about themselves and others colors and shapes their ability to learn. Their social emotional capacities powerfully affect--and even determine--the ability to listen and communicate; to concentrate; to recognize; understand, and solve problems; to cooperate; to modulate their emotional states; to become self-motivating; to resolve conflicts adaptively; in short, to become a member of the group.

Social emotional learning is a relatively new label for a process that is as old as human kind. It has been a part of schooling since the beginning of formal education 3,000 years ago in Egypt, India, and Greece in one form or another (Cohen, 1999a; Gardner,

1999a). For many centuries, only upper class men were educated and the pedagogic content typically reflected the dominant religious teachings of the time as well as the wish to instruct students about social norms. Some ancient education explicitly focused on enhancing awareness of self and others as a valuable educational endeavor in and of itself (e.g., the ancient Greeks). However, it is only in the last century that there has been a more explicit and ongoing appreciation that we can and need to teach all children about the social and emotional dimensions of life in schools. We must provide them with a basic understanding of the concept of social emotional competencies, as well as specific skills with which they can attain them.

The range of social emotional learning (SEL) practices presented in this volume have been nurtured by many overlapping traditions: the progressive education movement, in general, and elementary school education, in particular; affective education and the reflective educator movement; special education; the civil rights and the woman's movement; psychoanalytic and other school-based mental health work; and research in primary prevention and the development of social emotional competencies.

In recent years, there has been growing concern that more and more children are distressed, disturbed, and not motivated to learn. We all know that psychological and, too often, physical violence complicate and often derail educators' capacity to teach and children's capacity to learn. In America, a child is abused or neglected every 11 seconds; a child is arrested for a violent crime every 4 minutes; a child is shot dead every 98 minutes. On a typical school day, over 135,000 students bring weapons to school (Hamburg, 1992; Mott Foundation, 1994). Twenty-five percent of 10 to 17 year old American children suffer from school adjustment problems, problems that are predictive

of later, more serious problems (Dryfoos, 1990). Recent studies show that as students move into the adolescence (14 to 17 year olds), 35% of them engage in high-risk behavior. Between 15 and 22% of our nations youth experience social, emotional, and other problems that necessitate mental health treatment. And, approximately 80% of them are not receiving needed services (Dryfoos, 1997). These and related findings about the distressed state of children nationally and internationally have intensified our search for more effective ways by which we can help them develop into responsible, caring and healthy individuals.

Social emotional education is a fundamental part of the solution to these problems. Over the course of the last two decades, educators and researchers have discovered that high quality social emotional learning (SEL) programs improve students' academic performance, their adaptive social emotional behavior, and peer relations; they put a brake on drug problems, high-risk sexual behavior, aggression, and other forms of antisocial and maladaptive behavior (Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Durlak, 1996; Institute of Medicine, 1994; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). To the extent that we integrate social emotional learning into the life of our schools and homes, we are increasing our chances of having healthy, responsible, and caring learners. The specific social emotional skills, understanding, and values that these programs promote are a vital model for life.

There are literally hundreds of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and perspectives available to educators and school specialists today. In addition, there are scores of programs that focus on a particular facet of social and/or emotional functioning, such as conflict resolution, cooperative learning, and sex education programs.

In this chapter, I suggest a way of conceptualizing the core concepts and related practices that characterize effective SEL programs today. Before doing so, however, it may be useful to consider what we mean by social emotional competencies as well as to understand how SEL programs vary with regard to three basic dimensions: focus and scope; audience; and modes of infusion. I hope that this will further our ability to compare and contrast the programs and perspectives that comprise this essential domain of education.

### Social emotional competencies or modes of intelligence

Social and emotional competence refers to the capacity to understand, process, and express the social and emotional aspects of our lives. These competencies represent a mode of intelligence (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1997). What does it mean to be “intelligent”? Gardner defines intelligence as "a set of skills of problem solving--enabling the individual to resolve genuine problems or difficulties that he or she encounters, and, when appropriate, to create an effective product--and must also entail the potential for finding or creating problems -- thereby laying the ground work for the acquisition of new knowledge" (Gardner, 1983, p. 60).

Building on Gardner’s formulation, I would add that intelligence refers to three core processes: (1) being able to “read” or understand information (in a given domain) and then; (2) to use this information to solve real problems; and, finally, (3) to be a

creative learner. For example, gifted linguists or poets need to be able to “decode” written and/or spoken language and then use language to solve problems (i.e., how to make the next line rhyme in a manner that captures and/or extends the image of the developing poem) and/or to learn (e.g., to discover and/or create the next set of images in the poem). People who are musically gifted have abilities that allow them to “read” musical information. But it is more than this. Gifted musicians must build on their ability to “hear” or “read” musical information in order to play or to create a continuing score.

Social emotional intelligence involves the “decoding” of others and ourselves. That ability provides the foundation for problem solving, as well as the means by which we are enabled to grapple with a wide variety of learning challenges: how to modulate our emotional experiences; how to communicate; how to generate creative solutions; how to form friendships and working relationships; how to cooperate and, at the same time, become self-motivating.

Whether we label these fundamental capacities “competencies” or “modes of intelligence,” it is clear that children evince normal variation as well as deviations. Just as there is a normative range of linguistic or mathematical abilities, infants and children evidence a normative range in their capacity to be self-reflective and to recognize thoughts and emotions in others (Baron-Cohen, 1995a; Brothier, 1990; Izard & Harris, 1995). There are very rare instances where children present with major problems—deviations--in their underlying capacity to “read” others (Baron-Cohen, 1995b) or their own emotional states (Sifneos, 1996). Nonetheless, except in those extreme instances, it is important to recognize the ways in which we, as parents or educators, intentionally or not, act to promote the development of these fundamental capacities: how we model,

praise, and punish promotes or retards these capacities. Do we, in our understanding of others, stand as a role model? Do the ways in which we praise or punish enhance or undermine self-understanding? Do we articulate the value we place on social emotional literacy?

By the same token, social and emotional intelligence is one of the most important strengths an educator, school specialist, or parent can have. This capacity underlies our being able to “read the classroom” (or the dinner table!), to pay attention to but not be overwhelmed by our emotional experiences, to know when to push and when to wait--to in short, discover how we use so many moments to teach and to learn.

### Focus and Scope, Modes of Infusion, and Audience

Social emotional education varies in regard to which concepts and skills the program focuses on, what audience it is intended to address and how it seeks to infuse the particular skills and related sets of understandings. Figure 1 lists these three dimensions of SEL in a way that allows us to locate a given programmatic effort or point of view.

#### Focus and Scope

What do SEL programs focus on? Today, most SEL programs and perspectives seek to promote a wide range of social and emotional competencies. In varying degrees, they focus on skills, understanding, and values. Implicitly or explicitly, all effective SEL

efforts hope that their work will enhance children's motivation to put social skills and understanding into practice.

Skills. My review of the programs now in place reveals that most seek to promote the development of the following eight, overlapping sets of social emotional skills: awareness of self and others; emotional self-regulation; communication; self-motivation; problem solving and decision making; collaboration; and the formation of a more realistic, positive sense of self. As noted earlier, some programs focus on a specific social competence, like cooperative learning or violence prevention. And, in fact, cooperative learning and conflict resolution programs are the most wide spread SEL programs among our nations schools. As useful as these focused programs may be, recent educational research shows that it is more useful for schools to implement comprehensive child/school/home/community social emotional learning programs that address a wide range of social emotional competencies; they then become an integral facet of school life from kindergarten through the 12 grade (Elias et al., 1997; Weissberg, Gullotta, Hampton, Ryan, & Adams, 1997). Otherwise, it is too easy for programmatic efforts to be the latest in a series of educational fads that come and go in schools. Just as we believe that all children need to become linguistically literate and foster linguistic learning throughout children's educational life, so, too, do we underscore the continuing importance of social and emotional literacy.

While hundreds of curricular-based SEL efforts may seem to overlap or even duplicate each other in the skills they set out to teach, they are not equally helpful. First of all, only some of the programs actually teach socially and emotionally relevant skills in an empirically validated and effective manner. Although empirical research will never



capture the full complexity of emotional and social life, it is essential that these programs (like any intervention designed to be useful) are studied: rigorous research can lead to discovery about which kinds of individual and group interventions help. There is another and very different reason why some SEL efforts are not helpful to a particular school or district: there is no one program that will meet the needs of every school. Just as different children need different sorts of help to learn to read, the same holds true for emotional and social literacy. In fact, I hope that the “reflective questions” in this chapter will further educators’ ability to assess the effectiveness of what they are doing now and what further social emotional learning work may be most useful to institute in their school districts.

Understandings. In addition to skill acquisition, SEL programs--to a greater or lesser extent--also seek to enhance understanding, a socially and emotionally intelligent values, and an increased motivation to learn. As we learn more about ourselves, about others, and about the helpful (or unhelpful!) ways that we solve problems, we are developing a greater understanding about what provides the foundation for the use of skills. For example, what does it mean to be "responsible," to "fail" or "make a mistake," to "not know"? Like all substantive learning, discussion and reflection are typically an integral part of successful SEL programs. There are other kinds of simple, but profound understandings that these programs foster. For example, emotional life influences and often determines behavior; that we don't always recognize what we feel; learning how to “read” emotions--our own and others--is useful; and more.

Values. Skills, understanding, and enhanced motivation all contribute to the development of what I call a “socially and emotionally intelligent values”: a way of

thinking about others and ourselves that reflects particular concepts, standards and qualities that we consider worthwhile. It colors and shapes what we perceive. While the development of such values has become an implicit part of most SEL programs, it might be interesting to ask just what it means to adopt socially and emotionally intelligent values. There is no consensus here. I would suggest that it includes three major elements: that it is valuable and worthwhile to be a social and emotional discoverer; to use what we learn about ourselves and others to be helpful; and to comprehend and appreciate that virtually all of the time, people do their best. Other values that are explicit or implicit facets of many SEL programs include that we sometimes need to say “no” and that this is acceptable; that we can and should be caring and cooperative with and helpful to others.

Social emotional learning programs seek to enhance children’s motivation to put social skills, understanding, and values detailed above into practice. One of the many reasons why educational researchers and practitioners are increasingly focusing on the school as a whole is that when students experience school as a community, they become more motivated to care about its values--to engage in effective problem-solving strategies, perspective-taking, respectful conversation, and the use of other social and emotional skills they have acquired (Comer et al., 1996). In fact, this is one of the core concepts of effective SEL programs that I will describe in more detail later in this chapter: school-home-community partnerships. The motivation to put social skills and understanding into practice is enhanced to the extent that schools underscore the intrinsic reasons why it’s important to be responsible, collaborative and caring--such as the good feeling these behaviors engender, or the need to make the world a better place--rather than relying on adult praise or external rewards.

Formally or not, many educators and schools are involved with SEL today. When I confer with teachers, principals, and/or superintends, I often ask a series of questions that I hope will lead to a collaborative process of discovery and, sometimes, program planning.

#### Reflective Questions to Assess Program Planning:

- What do you think your school or district is focusing on in this area already?

How broad or narrow is the scope of your schools' work here?

- What is the sequence and scope of specific skills--and linked sets of understandings--which are being taught?

- In what ways do you believe these efforts are helpful and/or not helping?

- If you could, what one or two areas of social emotional functioning do you believe would be most useful for your school or district to focus on in the short- and long-term?

-- Insert Figure 1.1 about here --

#### Modes of infusion:

Social emotional learning programs and perspectives vary with regard to how they are infused. At one end of the spectrum, some programs are quite directive and detailed, for example, a stand-alone academic course. Just as we teach language arts and social science as a standard part of the curriculum, we can teach SEL as a formal course of study. I believe that the oldest example of this is the "Ethics" classes that have existed

within the Ethical Culture School: an independent school in New York City founded by Felix Adler over 100 years ago (Caroline, 1905; Radest, 1969). A more recent--and empirically studies--example can be found in New Haven, Connecticut: the Social Development Program is a K-12 curricular-based sequence of courses mandated by every school in the city; it includes detailed lesson plans for every class (Shriver, Schwab-Stone, & DeFalco, 1999). The PATHS program (Chapter 9) is another example of a stand-alone curriculum. For some educators and/or schools this is what they want and need.

At another point along a spectrum of ways that we can infuse SEL into school life, there are programs which present a more or less detailed perspective about child development and SEL, with a variety of methods that can be integrated into whatever we are doing in schools. For example, the Social Problem Solving/Decision Making Program is a programmatic effort that can be used as a stand-alone course or as an approach integrated into whatever the teacher is doing in a morning meeting in an academic class, or in a sports session (Elias & Bruene, 1999; Elias & Tobias, 1996). Although this program uses problem solving and decision making as organizing ideas, a range of skills/understandings are presented and taught. The Responsive Classroom Approach (Charney, 1992) is another example of an effort to present a point of view about learning, development, and discipline--one that can be integrated into any and all facets of daily school life.

At the other end of the spectrum are perspectives that present a point of view about child development and social emotional competence; they provide ways of thinking about how we can promote social emotional capacities. Arts education, for example,

represents a powerful point of view about how we can use analysis and imagination about musical sounds or a depicted scene as a way of learning about ourselves (e.g., Burton, Horowitz, & Ables, 1999) By the same token, a psychoanalytically informed perspective about child development and learning suggests that discovering more about our unrecognized as well as conscious thoughts and feelings profoundly furthers our ability to make sense of the world and become more effective problem solvers (Marans & Cohen, 1999).

Reflective Questions to Assess How Well SEL is Working:

- Different schools, like different people, have their own set of needs, wants and resources.
- What are your goals?
- In what ways are you and/or your colleagues infusing SEL into the classroom?
- What modes of infusion have the potential of building on what you are already doing in these areas?
- How do you know what is helping?
- What can you do to further clarify whether current as well as planned efforts are actually furthering your goals?

Audience:

Social emotional learning can serve three, overlapping audiences: (1) all children as part of the regular education process, (2) special needs students in special education programs, and, (3) the adults working with our children.

Children in regular education settings. Social emotional learning programs for “normal” children are designed to promote strengths. This effort represents an effective and extraordinarily important primary prevention and health enhancement effort (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). In recent years, we have learned that educators can teach children social emotional skills and values. Some children learn these skills and related sets of understandings without any formal instruction; they are simply an ongoing facet of home and/or school life. For many reasons, other children need and greatly benefit from more systematic instruction in schools. In any case, high quality social emotional education is fundamentally beneficial to all children. For example, we all want children to become life-long learners. However we define that term, it is clear that social emotional competence provides the foundation for continued receptivity to learning. “What do I care about?” “What do I really want and need to learn more about now?” “What do I do when I am confused or stuck?” “What is the problem here and how can I begin to solve this problem?” “How do I motivate myself to go the next step?” Our ability--or inability--to be reflective and to then use the information to solve problems and learn from it provides the platform upon which we can and do address all kinds of questions.

Special needs students. SEL can also focus on special needs students. When we work with the learning disabled, for example, we recognize that there are substantive psychosocial as well as neurocognitively based vulnerabilities that need to be addressed

academically, socially, and emotionally. The two major reasons why students are referred to special education in America today is for reading and behavioral problems. Social emotional educational efforts with special needs students includes not only understanding and dealing with the child's weaknesses or disabilities but also the drive to promote psychosocial strengths and build on "islands of competence" (Brooks, 1999).

Historically, the training of special educators has not included substantive work in the theory and practice of social emotional development and SEL. This is curious--and unfortunately--given that virtually all special educators are acutely aware that social emotional experience so often derail instruction and learning. Training in this area will enhance special education to be more effective in general as well as to further the national trend towards increased inclusion (integrating special education students into mainstream classes).

Educators and school specialists. Social emotional learning efforts can also serve educators and school specialists in two ways. On the one hand, educators can--and often do--informally and formally engage in SEL to further empathic and educative efforts. We must ask ourselves, for example, how can we "tune in" even more to where our students are developmentally? Or, what in the classroom makes us most angry and how does this affect our ability to learn and teach? Discovering more about "what gets to us" and the range of helpful (as well as unhelpful!) ways in which we can manage these moments enhances our ability to teach. It can also be rejuvenating. Then too, SEL staff development efforts can be used to strengthen effective communication and team building between educator and educator, teacher and administrator, and educator and parent (see Cohen, Shelton, & Stern, 1999).

Optimally, it is important that all members of school communities--regular and special education students, faculty, administration, staff, and parents--become involved with social emotional learning. When children learn about effective and flexible problem solving in the classroom but see their parents and administrators fighting in rigid, problematic ways, classroom-based instruction can go out the window. The fact is that the extent to which all of the adults in the child's life collaborate in SEL--from coaches to teacher aids, janitors, educators, and parents--will determine our chances of creating a community of learners and teachers who help one another, a community populated by a range of role models from whom students can learn.

#### Reflective Questions to Assess Audience for SEL

Currently, who (if anyone) is the audience for SEL efforts in your school? Are there any plans a foot to create additional and complimentary efforts to include educators and/or parents in your work? Or, could such a plan be initiated?

#### Core Concepts

There are five core concepts that characterize effective social emotional learning efforts. My understanding of these intrapsychic, interpersonal, and systemically related Concepts has grown out of three overlapping endeavors: the Education and Preparation Work Group of the Collaborative for the Advance of Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL); the Teachers College Social Emotional Learning Summer Institute faculty



meetings; and my review of scores of SEL programmatic efforts. Although different programmatic efforts use somewhat different terms and focus on a range of specific skills and understandings, I believe that all effective endeavors in this realm are shaped by the certain core concepts. I hope and expect that others will critique this schema and that, over time, further research and practice will refine and redefine the core concepts that characterize effective efforts in this area:

- The first “R”--reflective capacities or an enhanced awareness of ourselves and others--is the foundation for all learning and development;
- A developing awareness of self and others needs to be used to enhance our ability to solve problems flexibly;
- A developing awareness of self and others needs to be used to enhance our ability to learn and to be creative in a wide range of ways;
- Safe, caring, and responsive environments in which learning optimally takes place is of essential importance;
- Collaboration between school, home, and community needs to be a part of long-term implementation planning.

Here I have listed the concepts beginning with an internal-interpersonal focus (becoming more reflective) and ending with a much broader focus on systems (school-home-community) and long-term planning. However, I could just as easily have begun with the fundamental importance of creating a safe, caring, and responsive learning environment: the foundation for all learning! As I will describe next, these concepts overlap in a variety of ways. There is a range of ways that educators translate each of these core concepts into pedagogic practice. Here I will briefly some examples of the ways educators and school specialists have put these ideas into school-based practice.

## The First Core Concept

Promoting reflective capacities, that is, an ability to read ourselves and others, is the first core concept of effective SEL programs. It is the foundation for all learning and, as such, the “first R” (Cohen, 1999b). Reflective capacities involve personal and an interpersonal component that provide a person with the ability to understand and learn from social emotional experience. Just as children’s capacity to decode phonemes is the foundation for language learning, so, too, does the ability to decode others and ourselves become the foundation for social and emotional competencies or modes of intelligence. These fundamental capacities are described in developmental research (Baron-Cohen, Tager-Flusberg, & Cohen, 1993), in cognitive psychological studies (Morton & Frith, 1995), and in clinical psychotherapeutic research (Fonagy & Target, 1996).

Reflective capacities are important for many reasons. When children’s attributions of thoughts and feelings enables them to see actions as meaningful, their behavior becomes predictable. When parents have the ability to reflect on children’s inner experience empathically, they foster secure attachment; core psychological structures; and, by extension, a coherent, stable sense of self (Fonagy & Target, 1997). Reflective capacities promote communication; acknowledging the point of view of others, after all, is the essential ingredient in meaningful communication, in general, and effective social problem solving and conflict resolution, in particular. It is this capacity that allows teachers to form meaningful and helpful relationships with students, the basis of all learning (O’Neil, 1997; Pianta, 1999). What’s even more important to know, however, is that we, as educators and school specialists, can enhance these skills and related sets of

understandings within our students. In fact, whether we mean to or not, we influence the ways in which reflective capacities develop.

The first R provides the foundation, in short, for all that is essential in schools, be it the three R's or, as Gardner suggests the learning of "truth, beauty and goodness" (Gardner, 1999b). Reflective capacities also allow educators and school specialists to take two critically helpful steps, detailed next: (1) the early detection of social emotional problems; and (2) the promotion of social emotional literacy.

There is mounting evidence that suggests that reflective capacity--like children's phonetic decoding capacities--are biologically based (Baron-Cohen, 1995a, 1995b; Baron-Cohen, Tager-Flusberg, & Cohen, 1993). Like all neurocognitive basic building blocks of learning, children vary with regard to their reflective capacities: a normal variation. And, there are a very small percentage of children (e.g. those who suffer from an autistic disorder) who are significantly disabled in this regard: deviation. What is most important for parents, educators, and school specialists to know is that virtually all children can develop the ability to decode themselves and others. Also educators and parents have it within their power to help them do so.

Becoming more aware of others and ourselves involves both content and knowledge on the one hand and a process of learning on the other hand. People feel. Important facets of our emotional-cognitive experience are unrecognized but they color and shape behavior. Sometimes people project how they feel onto another. When we have powerful emotional experiences, this can complicate or interfere with our ability to think. These are examples of emotional knowledge. Some of these ideas are simple and

we tend to take then for granted: people feel. Yet, there are many instances when this is basic truth is minimized or negated. However, being reflective is more than learning about emotional truths or knowledge. Being reflective is also a process of discovery, for example, when I seek to recognize what you are feeling and thinking now or what I am thinking and feeling now. At its best, effective SEL efforts help children to recognize that learning--be it about themselves or language or music--always involves a process of discovery.

Pedagogically, educators put this core concept into practice in a variety of ways; ranging from structured lesson plans and particular ways of organizing morning meetings to values that underscore the importance of self-discovery and learning about the experiences of others. For example, some programmatic efforts teach children to “stop,” “pay attention to their body and their feelings,” and go through a series of cognitive-emotional steps to discover how their experience is “now.” Many social skills training programs focus on three, overlapping behaviors: awareness of feelings, perspective taking, and active listening. For example, some programs teach children “steps” and skills to become more aware of experience. Others seek to integrate this into all that they do in an ongoing manner. In the Wisdom of the Heart Program in Tel Aviv, every kindergarten classroom has a dream corner where children can tell and enact their dreams. Educators in this innovative SEL effort recognize that dreams can signal unrecognized feelings and thoughts that color and shape behavior. Discovering unrecognized feelings and thoughts is a critical part of enhancing reflective capacities. All of the programs featured in this volume include efforts to further this fundamental concept in a wide variety of ways. Here I would like to briefly describe four examples of

the fundamental importance of the first R which related to diversity, imagination, “not knowing,” and joy.

Diversity. Recognizing real and imagined differences, how we feel about them and how we manage these perceptions is profoundly important for us all to learn about. Race, religion, and gender--to name just a few categories of difference--commonly evoke reactions: “You are like me... or different.” “Because I label you in this way, I have a preconception (a prejudice) about who you are.” All SEL efforts seek to enhance students’ capacity to recognize who the other person is. Some efforts are particularly invested in helping us to learn about the problematic as well as extraordinarily wonderful facets of this basic dimension of life.

Imagination. Learning to listen to our imagination is another way that educators can promote the first R. This can and does overlap with the best of arts education. Although there has been only a limited dialogue between SEL practitioners and arts educators, they share a common ground: being invested in creating opportunities for students to discover more about who they are. Promoting imagination and the process of experimenting with various artistic mediums can be a powerful way of becoming more aware of self and others.

“Not knowing.” There are many factors that allow children to learn. For example, paying attention and being present as well as being open to new ideas are fundamental ingredients that allow us to learn. Being open and able to tolerate “not knowing” is another profoundly important and, often unrecognized, element that allows people to be active learners. When you or your child (student, son or daughter) does not understand

something, when do you or the child really let yourself “not know” on the one hand or—consciously or unconsciously—act as if you understand more than you do on the other hand? So often, children and adults alike, have a need to know or pretend that they understand something before they do. This can easily become a significant impediment to learning and discovery. A common linguistic example with young children, is a reader who too quickly “guesses” how to pronounce a new word instead of letting themselves realize “I don’t know this word, I’ve never seen it before, I have to struggle a bit to sound it out. I might need to ask for help here.” This openness to “not knowing” the word and then struggling to sound it out for the first time allows new language learning to occur.

Learning to be more aware of ourselves—the first R—supports our becoming more mindful of when we are confused or unsure. Most social and emotional education teaches children to become more active listeners: to themselves and others. Sometimes when we actively pay attention to experience, we immediately know what we think and/or feel; and sometimes, we are confused or initially “blank” or filled with a mix of seemingly confusing emotions and thoughts. Enhancing students awareness of self and others necessarily involved giving students permission to not know and this is often a powerful gift that will hold them in good stead for a life time.

Joy. As we become more aware of ourselves and others, this often leads to a core and precious educational experience: joy [footnote #1]. Educators yearn to foster the joy of discovery and learning within their students. Joy is an organizing experience for learners: it moves us and touches our core. Yet, we rarely write or talk about this in educational circles. Learning more about what others and ourselves experience does not necessarily lead to joy, but it certainly enhances the likelihood that we will connect to

what is most important to us and this creates fertile ground for an almost ineffable but profound experience. It is interesting to reflect upon what we do--or don't do--to foster greater awareness in our students and how this—sometimes--leads to a joy of learning.

Beyond pedagogic practice, how we act as educators is, as always, another powerful way to underscore the fundamental importance of being attuned to others and ourselves. Whether we mean to or not, our own reflective capacities influences how we tell stories, which, in a sense, is what we do all day. Reflective capacities also shapes how we interpret literary and historical texts and is related to the development of scientific reasoning and critical thinking (Astington, 1998). Educators set an example of appropriate behavior for students. Students learn about being related or not, being sensitive or not, being responsive or not, being open to discovery and “not knowing or not, being joyful in this process or not, from us. It is worth reflecting on our reflectiveness.

#### Reflective questions to Assess Your Own Reflectiveness

- In what ways are you--and are you not--reflective in your own day-to-day work with students?
- How do you promote curiosity about others and yourself?
- To what extent do you encourage students to “not know,” or appreciate confusion, which is so often the platform for new reflective learning?

#### The Second Core Concept

The second core concept that characterizes effective social emotional learning programs is that they enhance our ability to become more flexible and able problem solvers. We all have problems. A problem is a question to be considered or solved a person who presents difficulties, or a thorny situation. There are good problems and bad ones; some we solve automatically and some we struggle with; some make us happy and some make us very anxious and/or depressed. In fact, life can be seen as a series of problems. What varies is how we solve them: rigidly or flexibly, adaptively or unhelpfully, anxiously or calmly. When you have a problem, what do you say to yourself? And, what are the characteristic ways that you solve them?

Much of what we do in school is to help students learn about various ways of solving problems linguistically, artistically, kinesthetically, musically, historically, visually, mathematically--socially and emotionally. Although there are many definitions of intelligence, virtually all agree that the ability to solve real problems provides an essential facet of intelligence (Gardner, 1983).

Pedagogically, we can put this Concept into practice in a variety of formal and informal ways. Some programs explicitly and centrally focus on problem solving and decision-making (Elias & Brunei, 1999); they delineate specific “readiness” skills as well as a sequence of skills needed for effective problem solving. The following capacities are often considered essential: being able to listen, to remember and follow directions, to keep calm, to resist provocations. These skills are taught to students step by step so that they become automatic and available, even in stressful situations.



SEL programs define the route to problem-solving in different ways, but most include some version of the following eight steps: (1) look for signs of different feelings that may signal a problem; (2) tell yourself what the problem is; (3) decide on a goal; (4) stop and think of as many solutions to the problem as you can; (5) for each solution, think of all the things that might happen; (6) choose what, in your opinion, is the best solution; (7) plan it out and make a final check; and (8) try it and consider its ramifications (Elias & Brunei, 1999, p. 82). Some SEL programs advocate teaching these, and other, social emotional skills in isolation, before applying them. Some children clearly benefit from learning these steps just as it's easier for them to learn the "silent e" rule in reading before opening a book. There are other SEL programs that emphasize analysis of literature as one of many ways to enhance awareness of self and others and to then apply that knowledge to solving problems. Still other non-curricular based SEL perspectives implicitly and explicitly integrate an appreciation of problem solving into virtually all that we do.

Conflict resolutions programs, like the Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program (Lantieri & Patti, 1996), represent the largest and most common way that hundreds of schools have sought to teach students about one particular kind of problem. Learning to recognize when there is a conflict and how to manage and optimally learn from it is invaluable. These focused programs make a difference (Aber et al., 1998). Interestingly, more and more programs that focus on one topic (e.g., violence prevention) are expanding the scope of their work to include more of the concepts delineated here.

Many of the most well-studied SEL programs emerge from a cognitive-behavioral tradition and emphasize a social skills training perspective. Many of these programs

focus on two fundamental skills: being able to recognize and define our goals and decision making. The eight steps to solving problems are an example of this. Yet the best teachers and trainers who work with these—explicitly--cognitive models are wonderfully and importantly attuned to the subtle and necessarily complicated emotional and social processes that characterize human experience. Other SEL programs are less explicitly focused on the cognitive processes and steps involved and emphasize a point of view about learning and development and the fundamental importance of being able to create “teachable moments” from the ongoing “soup” of classroom life.

### Reflective Questions on Problem Solving

- How do you define a “problem”?
- When you have a problem, what range of responses do you have?
- What do you say to yourself?
- What do you think it means to be a flexible and able problem solver?
- To what extent do you think about the steps that are involved with effective problem solving?
- Is problem solving an explicit and/or an implicit part of what you do with children?

### The Third Core Concept

The third core concept that characterizes effective social emotional learning programs is that they enhance our ability to learn and become more creative in a wide range of ways. Beyond problem solving, intelligence encompasses the ability to learn, to

create, and to generate the kinds of questions that open the door to new learning (Gardner, 1983). Here are a few examples that many SEL programs emphasize: being able to collaborate with others; being able to manage our emotional life; being able to become self-motivating; learning how to set realistic goals; being able to communicate in clearly and directly; and using what we learn about ourselves and others to foster social relations and friendships.

Learning and creating inevitably overlap with solving problems. We hope that when we solve problems, we learn. And, we often have to be creative to solve the problem! In fact, all of the concepts that I am suggesting here overlap.

Programs that seek to enhance students' ability to be cooperative learners are probably the most long-standing and well-studied formal interventions that fall under the rubric of social emotional learning. Virtually all SEL efforts include cooperative learning as an important facet of their efforts. Teaching children to cooperate is certainly something that teachers of young children have done for decades, even before the important studies of the 1970s and 1980s by the Johnsons and others (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Teachers of young children have recognized that these and other fundamental social emotional capacities provide the foundation for traditional academic learning. In an overlapping manner, teachers of young children have historically been very attuned to the fundamental importance of helping children to listen to others and to themselves, to form new relationships, to control themselves, to communicate clearly, to gradually become more self-motivating, to follow and to lead.

In the last two or three decades researchers have confirmed what teachers and parents of young children have known for a long time: social emotional learning is as important as--if not more important than--linguistic and mathematical learning; it provides the foundation for all learning. We have also learned more about which particular skills and related sets of understanding are important and more likely to reduce violence, enhance resiliency, and further healthy learning and development. To a greater or lesser extent, the focus and scope of SEL programs seeks to use this research-based understanding. We have also learned more ways to teach these social emotional skills and understandings to children so that they become social emotional learners, creators, and problem solvers.

There is a wide range of ways in which this third concept is translated into pedagogic practice. Many programs teach a series of specific skills--initially in isolation--and as a part of a curricular-based program. For example, the following social skills are often explicitly taught in SEL efforts: management of feelings; social norm analysis; prosocial orientation; expressive communication; cooperation; negotiation; refusal; and help-seeking skills. Other programs, curricular and non-curricular based, may teach specific skills, sometimes alone and/or in context of a subject-based course. And still others seek to influence the climate of school system in such a way as to encourage caring, motivation, and responsible behavior.

Reflective Questions on How You Are a Creative Learner

- In addition to learning how to solve problems, what are the most important skills and linked sets of understanding that you would like your children and/or students to learn?
- What are you doing already? For example, many schools have been involved with cooperative learning.
- To what extent are children learning this fundamental and profound capacity? • What is contributing to this?
- What kinds of “learners” and “creators” do you most want your students to become?
- What are you doing now to promote these capacities?

### The Fourth Core Concept

Safe, caring, and responsive environments in which learning optimally takes place is of essential importance. How children and adults alike experience themselves and others inevitably color and shape their ability to learn. Fundamentally then, social emotional experience is the foundation for learning, be it linguistic, mathematical, aesthetically, athletically, visually, or psychosocially. For example, how do you feel right now as you read these words? To the extent that you are feeling anxious, depressed, or distracted, you will—naturally--have more trouble concentrating on the words and whatever associations they generate. On the other hand, the extent to which you are feeling safe, “present,” focused, calm, and receptive to the idea of “not knowing,” you will be more able to process, reflect upon, disagree/agree, understand, and then assess the value and meaning of the ideas you are reading about. This is even truer of children who are still in the midst of developing the capacity to modulate emotional life.

We all remember the best and the worst moments of our own elementary school experience. For virtually all of us, the best moments are the ones when we felt recognized, understood, cared for, and supported. Those moments were profound. Conversely, our worst memories of elementary school were when we felt misunderstood, shamed, anxious and/or alone. These were the moments that cast complicating and undermining shadows over the learning process. In both instances, relationships provided the context for learning. Just as we know that relationships provide the foundation for security and the experience of attachment in infancy and childhood, so, too, are they the foundation for a sense of well-being and healthy relationships (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). And, it's that feeling of well-being, instilled in students by caring educators, that promotes learning and development (Nodding, 1992; Pianta, 1999).

There is a range of practices that can be integrated into classrooms and schools to promote safe, caring, and responsive centers of learning. Creating such places reflect the kind of relationships we engender in our classrooms, hallways, and playgrounds as well as in our faculty rooms and parent-teacher encounters. The extent to which we create classrooms and learning communities in which children feel comfortable, safe, and protected determines how successful they will be in identifying with and forming secure relationships with adults. In fact, this is a fundamental and explicit facet of the Comer School Development Program and the Responsive Classroom Approach (Charney, Crawford, & Wood, 1999).

In some important respects, this is the heart of the Comer School Development Program which is one SEL program that has had a transformative effect on hundreds of schools across America: creating an active collaboration between school and home in order to foster a climate where children feel safe and helpfully responded to. It is difficult to internalize a sense of well-being, positive self-regard, and a passion for achievement, not to mention, concentration when schools or households are chaotic, abusive, or characterized by low expectations for students (Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, & Joyner, 1999; O'Neil, 1997).

#### Reflective Questions to Assess Safety, Caring and Responsiveness

- What do you do to promote a sense of safety, caring and responsiveness in your work with children?
- What do you do and/or what kinds of moments, sometimes inadvertent, interfere with your being able to foster such a climate?
- What are two or three actions you would like to set in motion to further promote a caring, responsive and safe classroom/school?

#### The Fifth Core Concept

The final core concept that characterizes effective SEL programs is that they include thoughtful and collaborative long-term planning between school, home, and community. This concept combines interpersonal with systemic processes: how we work together as individuals but also how the larger systems in the community operate together or inadvertently in opposition.

Children learn at home as well as at school. Educational practitioners and policy makers alike recognize that no single institution can create all of the conditions that students need in order to learn and develop in healthy, responsible, and caring ways (Dryfoos, 1998). Educators, parents, and members of the community need to be effective and collaborative partners. It is simply common sense that when both parents and teachers value literacy (be it learning to read a book or learning to “read” ourselves and others) children are more likely to appreciate this mode of learning as well. By the same token, SEL is undermined when parents and teachers cannot resolve conflicts creatively and peacefully between themselves, but at the same time conflict-resolution and related values and skills are taught in the classroom.

Active and involved parents, neighborhood leaders, religious leaders, community based organizations, local government, and the media all have an important role to play in supporting the school’s mission. By the same token, schools need to understand what parents value, want, and need. Creating a partnership between school and the community is an organizing facet of many--if not most--effective school reform efforts. As educators and policy makers have recognized this, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of school-community partnerships in the last decade (Melaville, 1999). Effective school-community partnerships do make a difference in improving educational quality, academic outcomes, and effective reform efforts. For example, most high-performing schools serving disadvantaged children include innovative ways to create educator-parent-private sector partnerships (National Association of State Coordinators of Compensatory Education, 1996). Creating a genuine, active partnership between the school and parents is the foundation of the Comer School Development Program (Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes



& Joyner, 1999). And, it is a guiding Concept for effective social emotional learning programs (Elias et al; 1997).

There are many ways that reform efforts can further partnerships between the school and the community. Most often, educators initiate reform efforts and parents and members of the community are involved in genuine and vital ways. School-community partnerships contribute to school improvement by fostering positive, healthy relationships, focusing on and building upon strengths, and enhancing the adults' ability to identify issues, mobilize resources, and promote social emotional as well as economic well-being for families, neighborhoods, and the school itself (see Melaville, 1999, for a recent review of these issues).

School-community partnerships in general and social emotional learning in particular need to be an ongoing facet of children's lives to be most helpful and effective. Like all learning, the acquisition of social emotional competence must be an ongoing facet of school life. A year is not enough. Instead, it is a long-term programmatic effort. Optimally, SEL is an integral part of school life from preschool through grade 12. Parents, educators, and society value language abilities and do not expect that students will learn to read or write within a year or two or three. The same needs to be true for social emotional learning.

There are some SEL leaders and trainers who only agree to learn and teach in a given school or district that has made a three-year commitment. They have found that it is unrealistic to expect that substantive change will occur when the educational system creates a more short-term plan. There are certainly many schools and districts that value

short-term awareness presentations or mini-courses about any number of new and potentially useful educational ideas. However, virtually all agree that substantive SEL is a long-term and ongoing process.

### Reflective Questions to Assess Our Collaborative Plans

In what ways do parents and educators in your school and district create partnerships to find solutions to problems and/or to define the values and goals for your class and school? What are the concerns that exist (if any) about creating a school-community partnership? How realistic are these concerns and what are realistic options that exist to address these concerns? How do people in your school/community manage a conflict between school and home? What kind of reflection, learning, and problem-solving does your community most need to recognize the stumbling blocks that exist? Finally, to the extent that your school and community are considering the implementation of SEL programs, what kind of short and long term planning are you considering?

### Conclusion

Social emotional education refers to the process of learning to read ourselves and others and then using this growing awareness to solve problems flexibly, to learn, and to be creative. To a greater or lesser extent, educators have sought to foster this kind of learning for decades, if not centuries. In recent years, researchers and practitioners have affirmed how fundamentally important these modes of learning are. We have also learned a great deal about how to most effectively integrate SEL into school life. There is no one

best way to promote SEL. Today, there are literally hundreds of educational efforts that fall under the rubric of social emotional learning.

This chapter presents a number of dimensions that we can use to understand, compare, and contrast these efforts. On the one hand, social emotional education varies with regard to which concepts and skills the program focuses on, what audience it is intended to address, and how it seeks to infuse particular skills and related sets of understandings. Focus, audience, and modes of infusion are three dimensions that schools can consider when they are reviewing what has already been done in this area on the one hand and which SEL program and/or perspectives may be most useful for their system and needs on the other hand. Finally, this chapter describes five core concepts that characterize effective social emotional learning efforts as well as some examples of the many ways that we can translate these concepts into pedagogic practice.

In this volume you will learn about a range of ways that we can promote social and emotional learning with the young children we teach and learn with in schools today. To a greater or lesser extent, all of the chapters in this volume underscore the fundamental importance of recognizing what our children are feeling and thinking as well as where they are developmentally. Many focus on how we can create safe, caring, and responsive learning situations. Finally, most present a range of ways that we can further development and learning in this most fundamental and profound dimension of life: social and emotional.

*Some final reflective questions:* How would you describe what you are already doing to enhance social and emotional capacities in your school? What is clear and not so clear

about additional goals (understandings and/or specific skills) that you believe you and your colleagues can and should focus on? What do you need to learn and/or to do that will further the creation of a realistic plan to accomplish these goals? Consider creating a small group or school-wide process of actually writing statements about your commitment to this work and specific actions plans that will be used to collaboratively further planning and implementation. How can we help each other to further learning about and implementing effective SEL programs and perspectives in our schools today? What can organizations like the Center for Social and Emotional (CSEE) and the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning do to further support your efforts?

Footnote #1: I am grateful to Tom Berner for reminding of this core experience: joy.

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