

Social-Emotional Development

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Overview

With increasing standards for literacy and math, educators have often overlooked the role of children’s social-emotional skills. Recently, however, researchers have argued that children’s emotional development (including how children display emotions and regulate themselves) and their social skills are equally important to academic success as their cognitive skills (Denham, 2006; Raver, 2002). Early academic achievement is critically important because children who have difficulty in the early school years tend to continue to perform poorly throughout the elementary school years. Given such, it is imperative that children’s programs to improve academic success also focus on children’s social and emotional competence.

There are a number of important social-emotional skills involved in children’s success in school. This paper will focus on three key social-emotional areas:

- Effortful Control/Regulation
- Emotion Understanding
- Emotional Expressivity

Each of these key skills has been shown to be directly related to how well children transition into formal schooling. Further, there is evidence that these skills have indirect effects through other areas of social-emotional development (Eisenberg, Sadovsky & Spinrad, 2005).

Effortful Control/Regulation

Effortful control is a term used to refer to the regulatory aspect of temperament. In their chapter from the *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Rothbart and Bates (2006) define effortful control as “the ability to inhibit a dominant response and/or to activate a subdominant response, to plan, and to detect errors” (p. 129). Thus, effortful control is typically viewed as the ability to willfully deploy attention (attention focusing and shifting) and inhibit or activate behavior as required.

