Northwestern College, Iowa

NWCommons

Summer 2019

Social Emotional Development in Early Childhood

Dawn Askeland

Social Emotional Development in Early Childhood

Dawn Askeland

Northwestern College

A Literature Review Presented

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Early Childhood Inclusive

August 2019

Dr. Syed

Table of Contents

Abstract

This literature review explores young children's social emotional development and its importance. Social emotional development is crucial to a child's success in school and in life. Social emotional development is defined and ideas are presented on how to promote it. Social emotional skills can be promoted in early childhood classrooms everyday. This can be done in a variety of lessons and activities. Social emotional development can be promoted by embedding it in all areas of the day. In recent years, other priorities have been seen in early childhood classrooms and at home. Some researchers believe this has resulted in a lack of promotion of social emotional development in young children. This literature review will explore academic pushdown, technology and children, and limited free time, including recess. These may affect a young child's social emotional competency, therefore they may exhibit more challenging behaviors. Three social emotional development programs are explored. Social emotional development is so vital in the early years of a child's life. Families and teachers need to understand its importance.

Keywords: social emotional development, early childhood

Social Emotional Development in Early Childhood

It is vital to promote social emotional development in young children. It is important to promote this development in the early childhood classroom and at home. Social emotional skills include problem solving, taking turns, empathy, decision-making, and relationship building (Durlak & Weissberg, 2011; Fettig, Santos, & Shaffer, 2012). All of these skills and more are important for present and future relationships and academic success. If children have competent social-emotional skills, their secondary-performance and completion is higher, they will be more successful in their careers, and become a more successful adult (Domitrovich, Durlack, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017). It is essential that social-emotional skills be promoted in the early years. If the stage is not set at an early age, many children will exhibit challenging behaviors. Children need to be taught appropriate ways to communicate and handle their emotions.

This literature review focuses on the importance and effects of social emotional development. It takes a look at how to promote these skills in the classroom and at home and why they may not be in the forefront of today's early childhood classrooms. First, an overview is provided of what social-emotional skills are and why they are important. Building relationships and practicing intentional teaching is also examined. A developmentally appropriate early childhood classroom must promote social emotional learning effectively. In recent years there have been some roadblocks. Possible reasons why social-emotional skills may not be promoted as well as they should be are presented. These include academic pushdown, effects of technology, and lack of recess and free time. Finally, three social-emotional learning programs are discussed. These programs intentionally teach social-emotional skills. Using a social emotional program helps to create a supportive environment where the focus is on the development of social-emotional skills.

Literature Review

Social-emotional development plays an important role throughout a child's lifetime.

Many early childhood theorists have stressed the importance of social emotional development.

Albert Bandura, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky believed in the power of social interaction and its

importance in the process of learning and development (Baylor & Kim, 2006; Devries, 1997).

Bandura's social cognitive theory was founded in social interaction. He believed children learned

by observing the behavior of others. Children need to be provided with choices and the power

over their own learning. Bandura believed that by allowing children to gain independence, their

self-efficacy would be enhanced. This efficacy is impacted by social experiences (Baylor & Kim,

2006).

Piaget's and Vygotsky's social theories also encourage peer interactions and relations.

Piaget believed that much could be gained in the cognitive development area based on social

experiences. These experiences are with both adults and peers. The goal of these experiences is

for a child to gain autonomy and self-regulation. Both the adult relationship and the child

relationship should be respectful, trustful and cooperative, along with encouraging empathy and

being one of mutual affection and trust. Piaget believed that by creating such relationships a

child's social skills were strengthened (DeVries, 1997). DeVries (1997) developed five

principles for early childhood education, based on his own experiences in preschool-grade two.

These principles focus on relationships, cooperation, conflict resolution and community. DeVries

(1997) states that teachers should develop lessons and activities based on the interests of the

children. Piaget's sociocognitive theory supports these principles. He believed that by promoting

social development, cognitive development is also being promoted (DeVries, 1997). Piaget and

Vygotsky both believed that adults should provide a socially interactive classroom that promotes

social emotional development. This can be provided through group games, decision-making,

negotiating, interacting, voting and developing of classroom rules (Baylor & Kim, 2006;

Devries, 1997).

Statistics from the National Center for Children in Poverty (Cooper, Masi, & Vick, 2009)

show that young children's development and school readiness are affected by social-emotional

problems. Children need to have adequate social emotional skills to be successful in the

classroom and to become successful adult citizens. If children's social and emotional needs are

not met, including the promotion of social emotional skills, they are more likely to experience

delinquency and mental health problems (Cooper et al., 2009).

Defining Social Emotional Development

Social emotional development has many definitions. According to The Center on the

Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), social emotional development is

the development that happens in children birth through age 5 that allows a child to have trusting

relationships with both adults and peers; be able to express emotions in appropriate ways; and

become independent and comfortable to investigate their surroundings (Ashdown & Bernard,

2012). According to Ashdown and Bernard (2012) there are five core social emotional

competencies. These are: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills

and responsible decision-making. These are vital to young children's welfare. Social emotional

skills include self confidence, goal setting, empathy, responsible decision-making, concentration,

persistence, attentiveness, effective communication and problem-solving (Ashdown & Bernard,

2012; Durlak & Weissberg, 2001; Fettig, Santos, & Shaffer, 2012).

Benefits of Social Emotional Development

There are many benefits to promoting social emotional development at home and in the classroom. Children are better able to interact with others successfully if they have the tools to use when conflict arises. Not only are children's social lives better if they have social emotional competence, academic performance is affected, as well. Their attitude towards school is more positive and they will demonstrate higher academic performance (Funk & Ho, 2018). Children who have a deficit in the area of social emotional development have a higher risk of challenging behaviors, including aggression, delinquency, and substance use (Domitrovich et al., 2017). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), an indicator of a quality early childhood program is its promotion of social-emotional skills. This should be one of the main focuses of these programs (Funk & Ho, 2018).

Promoting Social Emotional Development

Children enrolled in an early childhood program devoted to promoting social skills will obtain the skills needed to be successful in childhood and in adult life. According to Funk and Ho (2018), the two most important practices used to promote children's social and emotional development are building relationships and intentional teaching. Building trusting relationships provides a child with security. Children will feel more comfortable asking questions, independently solving problems, trying new activities and verbally expressing themselves (Funk & Ho, 2018). Relationships should be built gradually with children and their families. This is an essential part of a quality early childhood program (Corso, 2007). Positive interactions will help promote respectful relationships and make a positive difference in a young child's life. By creating opportunities for these interactions to occur, children will feel validated. To create

positive relationships with children, teachers need to intentionally embed these opportunities into their classrooms each day (Dombro, Jablon, & Stetson, 2011).

The second most important practice, according to Funk and Ho (2018) is being intentional about teaching social emotional skills. There are many successful ways to promote social emotional development that can be embedded into a classroom's everyday schedule. Funk and Ho (2018) provide many suggestions on how to do this. Social emotional development can be promoted through the use of children's books, activities, teachable moments, specific praise, modeling and visual cues. Young children need to understand the expectations of a classroom. They need to know what, when and how to achieve the expectations. If a child is successful in knowing all of these things, challenging behaviors will be less (Corso, 2007). Teachers can do this by creating supportive, classroom environments. Environments, both physical and social, need to be designed around how young children learn. Children need to be able to engage in meaningful activities through play. Opportunities for play need to be based on children's interests, ability levels and backgrounds (Corso, 2007). Whether play is child-initiated or teacher-initiated, it is one of the most powerful learning strategies for young children (Graue, 2009). Strategies for learning social skills include describing, modeling, rehearsing and role-playing, all of which can be done through play (Corso, 2007). Providing young children with opportunities for a variety of learning experiences will enhance these skills. Social-emotional learning can be done in large and small group settings and during center time and outdoor play, along with other child-directed activities. It is important to provide opportunities that are fun and understandable for young children. These include using puppets, songs, games and books.

Using children's books can be a powerful social-emotional learning tool. By reading a book aloud to children and asking them open-ended questions, many social-emotional skills are

being practiced (Funk & Ho, 2018). This is a routine when children can be allowed time to

discuss their own experiences that relate to the book. Children's books are a great way to discuss

emotions, problem-solving techniques and relate that to children's own experiences (Funk & Ho,

2018).

Another approach to promoting all areas of development, including social emotional, is

Holistic Education. This is a way of education that was promoted by Ron Miller (Heishman &

Kochhar-Bryant, 2010). Holistic education is defined by Heishman and Kochhar-Bryant (2010)

as a learning community in which the whole person is refined. Development is promoted

intellectually, emotionally, socially, physically, artistically, creatively and spiritually. Holistic

education is a whole child, child-centered approach to education. According to Brooks, Coyne,

Hanafin, McDonnel, and Rouine (2009) there are three domains with which a whole child

perspective are concerned with. The first domain is focused on social emotional competencies,

such as emotional well-being, self-care, relationships and identity. The other two domains are

focused on relationships, supports and services from families, schools and communities (Brooks

et al., 2009). Within Holistic Education, children are active participants in the development of

the learning environment and of the learning itself. Heishman and Kochhar-Bryant (2010)

provide some characteristics of the whole child. These characteristics include empathy,

creativity, confidence, intellectual activity and social competency. Promoting these

characteristics lays a solid foundation for children to succeed in school and in adulthood

(Heishman & Kochhar-Bryant, 2010).

One educational program promoting social emotional skills by focusing on the whole

child is Waldorf education. This educational program is based on Rudolf Steiner's work. Steiner

was an Austrian philosopher, scientist, and educator. He was concerned with children being able

to overcome obstacles of a post-industrial world (Easton, 1997). Waldorf education is interested

in creating a learning community where children are active participants in their environment and

learning. Teachers integrate visual arts, music and tactile arts into all subject areas. The arts are

considered critical at each stage of development. Music and storytelling are used to create a

calming environment. The environment that is created by teachers and children affect the

children's gratitude, harmony, reverence and sense of well-being. In Waldorf education teachers

nurture the whole child-head, hands, and heart (Easton, 1997). Easton (1997) interviewed 50

Waldorf students in grades 7-12. Many stated that a Waldorf education made a difference in the

world. They felt that it was caring, integrated the arts and focused on social concerns. By

creating a sense of community and building strong relationships, all areas of development are

enhanced, including social emotional. The whole child is supported, which lead to future success

(Easton, 1997; Heishman & Kochhar-Bryant, 2010).

Elements Affecting Social Emotional Skills

In recent years, some elements may be affecting how and if social emotional

development is being promoted appropriately in the early childhood classroom. Three major

elements are academic pushdown, technology use, and limited free time. These elements are

current trends that have gained much attention.

Academic pushdown. Academic pushdown is the occurrence of early childhood

classrooms focusing more on academic development than developing all developmental

domains, including social emotional development (Harmon & Viruru, 2018). Such a focus on

academics can have a detrimental effect on a young child's development. Many researchers

credit the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act and the adoption of the Common Core with

academics being the main focus in early education (Almon, Carlsson-Paige, & McLaughlin,

2015; Graue, 2009; Harmon & Viruru, 2018). Being more academically focused, which has left young children with less free time, means less time for them to build relationships and explore. This leads to less time practicing social skills (Graue, 2009). Without time to do these things, a child's social emotional development will not reach its full potential. Many teachers are noticing that this is leaving children feeling inadequate, anxious and confused (Almon et al., 2015). Academic pushdown has not been proven to be effective in achieving higher academic achievement. The HighSchope's Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study in classrooms that used direct instruction methods, nearly half of children needed special education for social differences. Attending a play-oriented preschool resulted in the number of children needing additional help with social differences to be considerably less. A study in Germany also found that children from play-based programs scored better on 17 measures, including social and emotional skills (Almon et al., 2015). Early childhood programs need to provide environments that help students develop all developmental domains (Graue, 2009). Early childhood teachers need to promote social and emotional skills in order for all other domains to be affected. According to Funk and Ho (2018) social emotional learning should be part of daily routines. This can be achieved by reading children's books and asking the children open-ended questions. Other ways to promote social emotional development include providing specific positive reinforcement, modeling appropriate behavior and providing cues, including visual and long term (Funk & Ho, 2018). Children also need time to play and interact with their peers throughout the day. Child-initiated play is one of the most effective instructional approaches (Graue, 2009).

Academic pushdown lessens the time children are allowed to interact with their peers. With more early childhood classrooms focusing on Common Core standards, children have less time to practice social skills through exploratory play. Many children currently entering

Kindergarten are entering without essential social skills (Graue, 2009). Teachers need to remain

focused on how young learners learn best. Promoting cognitive, physical, social and emotional

concepts and skills provides the best foundation for learning.

      Technology use. Young children are increasingly exposed to technology. Technology

surrounds them from a young age. The findings by research cited by McCarrick and Xiaoming

(2007) are inconclusive. There is a difference of opinion as to whether computer use is harmful

or beneficial to a young child's development. Findings have suggested that technology can be

harmful. Other findings have concluded that it is not harmful to a young child's development

(McCarrick & Xiaoming, 2007).

      According to Hsin, Li, and Tsai (2014), some researchers view technology as detrimental

to a child's social emotional development. They view using technology as individual work,

which limits peer and teacher interaction. Another concern is that technology is used for

entertainment purposes in the classroom, leading teachers to use other teaching methods less

frequently. Technology is seen as a distraction, too abstract for young children who need

concrete learning experiences. Studies have found that when children are engaging in

technology, they engage in more parallel play, rather than cooperative play (McCarrick &

Xiaoming, 2007). This decreases the chance of children interacting and engaging in social

experiences with one another.

      While some view technology as being detrimental to young children's social

development, others have found that it actually promotes it. Only one study reviewed by Hsin,

Li, and Tsai (2014) found that individual goals were pursued more when children were using a

touchscreen. Technology is very motivating for young children. This may allow children to be

more focused on their learning when using computers or other forms of technology. Some

advocate that computers are simply another learning tool that can be used in the classroom. By using open-ended software, children are gaining decision-making and initiative skills. Open-ended software also lends itself to the promotion of critical thinking and problem solving skills (McCarrick & Xiaoming, 2007). When children work together on computers or other types of technology, they learn to negotiate and take turns. Conflicts may arise while working together and young children will need to solve problems. Technology is very prevalent in young children's lives. Some advocates state that, since this is true, children should begin using technology at an early age, when they are motivated and fearless to learn (McCarrick & Xiaoming, 2007).

The use of technology and young children still remains a controversy. With research findings coming to different conclusions, it is easy to see why more research needs to be done on the effects of technology and social emotional development.

Limited free time. Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2011, more schools have restructured their schedules to include less unstructured recess time. This has led to children missing social opportunities (Bohn & Pellegrini, 2005). Children need unstructured, social time to promote and enhance social skills, such as communication, cooperation, sharing, turn taking, negotiating and problem solving (Garner, Murray, & Ramastetter, 2010). Other benefits of recess include increased learning, better classroom management, fostering social development, promoting physical well-being, cooperation, sharing, initiating, building relationships and communication skills (Garner et al., 2010; Chang & Coward, 2015). All of these benefits are important for social emotional development. Recess offers the unstructured time needed to develop these skills, but is being limited in schools across the country. A survey of school districts in 2006 and 2007 indicated that around one-fifth of school districts had reduced recess

by an average of 50 minutes per week (Garner et al., 2010). Chang and Coward (2015) compared

the recess times of schools in Shanghai and the United States. They found that recess time was

considerably less in the United States. Older students in Shanghai continue to have recess time,

while American children do not. Even with recess times being longer in Shanghai, their students

are among the highest achieving in the world (Chang & Coward, 2015).

By reducing or eliminating recess time, many social skills are not being promoted. By

limiting recess time, young children may not gain the social skills needed to function

appropriately in the classroom and in life. Unstructured time, including recess, provides children

time to become independent thinkers. During play, they have to decide what they will play and

who to play with. Having unstructured time aside from academic time promotes learning in the

classroom (Bohn & Pellegrini, 2005). Policies have been put into place that eliminate

unstructured time for students. Many times this is done to promote higher levels of achievement

(Chang & Coward, 2015). By providing children with these unstructured times, they will be

better adjusted to school and achieve higher levels of learning. Being socially and emotionally

competent helps a young child adjust to the pressure of a school setting. By being more well

adjusted in the classroom, children are better able to focus on academics.

Social Emotional Development Programs

Although social emotional skills can be developed throughout the day in a classroom,

adopting a social emotional development program will ensure that proper instruction in this area

is taking place. There are many different types of programs available to schools. Durlak et al.

(2011) and Domitrovich et al. (2017) recommend SAFE practices for social emotional programs.

SAFE stands for sequence, active, focused and explicit. Programs should be sequential, building

on previous skills. They should also include lessons in which children are active learners. The

focus should be on social emotional development and those skills should be explicitly taught. In a study discussed by Durlak et al. (2011), after implementation of a social emotional program, complete with interventions, children's social skills were more competent. They also had more positive attitudes and behaviors, along with increased academic performance. Three popular social emotional programs are further explored below.

        Promoting alternative thinking strategies. Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) is another social emotional program that can be used with young children. The goals of this program are to promote child mental health, social and emotional competency, self-control, self-concept and problem solving skills (Arda & Ocak, 2012; Cortes, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2007; Edgerton, Graham, Kelly, Robertson, & Syme, 2015). This is done through 9 thematic units, with 44 lessons. The units include compliments, basic and advanced feelings and self-control strategies (Arda & Ocak, 2012; Cortes, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2007). PATHS was designed for children ages 3-5 years of age. Lessons are designed using direct instruction, modeling, story telling, role-playing, writing, signing, drawing, science and math, games, art projects and books (Cortes et al., 2007; Cooper, Masi, & Vick, 2009).

        Edgerton et al. (2015) and Arda and Ocak (2012) found that children who had been taught using the PATHS program gained positive attributes, such as being more well-adjusted, exhibiting higher levels of social interactions, along with improved compliance and cooperation. When implemented appropriately, PATHS also reduced aggressive and disruptive behaviors (Arda & Ocak, 2012). This program achieves this by providing real world opportunities for children. They are able to practice these skills throughout their school day (Cortes et al., 2007).

        The PATHS program does not include any formal parent training or strategies for engagement. By conducting parent interviews, Edgerton et al. (2015) found that parents wanted

to learn more about the program. Parents communicated that the programs implementing PATHS need to involve parents more actively. Parents becoming actively involved have been shown to affect the effectiveness of the program (Edgerton, 2015).

With the PATHS program, coordinators should be established to help facilitate the program and ensure that teachers are implementing it with fidelity. Coordinators will do this by visiting the classrooms monthly. Teachers are provided education in the PATHS program. They also receive on-going training (Arda & Ocak, 2012; Cortes et al., 2007; Edgerton et al., 2015).

Positive behavior support (PBS). According to Benedict, Horner, and Squires (2007), PBS is a system wide approach, which helps reduce challenging behaviors. PBS has the best outcome if all staff use consistent strategies, expectations and language. In a study involving 600 schools, Broyles, Fox, Hemmeter, and Jack (2007) found that the use of PBS program wide had very positive results. The incidences of problem behaviors decreased, as well as office referrals and in school and out of school suspension. The use of PBS also correlated to increases in academic achievement (Broyles et al., 2007).

This program is based off of a Teaching Pyramid, which has 3 levels, or tiers. Tier 1 is concerned with relationships and classroom environment. At this level, expectations are intentionally taught in a positive manner. Routines are put into place at this level to create a safe, predictable environment (Benedict et al., 2007; Broyles et al., 2007). By establishing trusting relationships and consistent routines and expectations, children benefit greatly. By doing so, children are more trusting of adults and are more willing to engage with them. They are able to become more independent by solving problems, trying new tasks, asking questions and expressing their thinking (Funk & Ho, 2018).

Tier 2 is focused on a smaller group of children who need further social skill promotion. These children may exhibit challenging behaviors and have deficits in social skills (Benedict et al., 2007). Interventions are put into place for these students that are intentional and systematic. These interventions are targeted to promote the social emotional skills that are lacking. They are provided to children in a manner that is the most beneficial. This may include small group or 1:1 instruction (Benedict et al., 2007).

If a child does not respond to strategies put into place in Tier 1 and Tier 2 and challenging behavior persists, they will move on to Tier 3. In this tier, individualized interventions are developed. These interventions need to be implemented practically, appropriately for a child's culture and based on functional behavior assessments (Benedict et al., 2007). By implementing a tiered approach, the needs of all children will be met.

When implementing this program a Leadership Team should be developed. This team should be comprised of staff, including someone trained and experienced with supporting challenging behaviors. Administrators are also a vital component when implementing PBS. The Leadership Team will actively support all staff.

Another important aspect of implementation is family involvement. Families need to understand the programs expectations and should be provided opportunities to provide feedback. In the study by Broyles et al. (2007), it was found that involving families was an asset to programs. By educating families and providing them support to implement PBS strategies at home, siblings of current enrollees entered the program already knowing what the expectations would be. This provides an easier transition for children and teachers.

Implementation of PBS takes time and dedication by all staff. If done with fidelity, PBS has positive outcomes. These include confidence of staff in supporting children with challenging

behaviors, a decrease in referrals to consultants and more positive behavior interventions (Broyles et al., 2007). Children's school success is affected by social emotional competence. A consistent, system-wide approach will help promote young children's social-emotional development, as well as support school readiness and address challenging behaviors (Broyles et al., 2007). This can be done by implementing PBS program-wide.

Second step. Second Step is a social emotional learning (SEL) program, which aims to help children develop social-emotional skills. Its goal is that by developing these skills, children will grow into successful adults with satisfying lives (Frey, Guzzo, & Hirschstein, 2000). Second Step is a universal program that is based on the social learning theory. Bandura's social learning theory recognizes that children learn when they observe and interact with others, particularly, their peers. Social interaction promotes cognitive growth in children. Learning can be a highly social activity. By observing and learning from peers, children's self-efficacy is increased (Baylor & Kim, 2006). Second Step emphasizes the importance of observation, self-reflection and reinforcement. These three things help a child acquire and maintain behavioral skills (Frey et al., 2000).

In the Second Step program lessons are taught one time per week, lasting 25-40 minutes, depending on the age of children (Frey et al., 2000). Second Step is successful when it is school wide, involving all staff, and when it has parental involvement. There are four main units taught in the Second Step program. These are: skills for learning, empathy, emotion management and problem solving. Children's verbal perspective taking and social problem-solving abilities are significantly improved with the Second Step program. Their social skill knowledge is also significantly higher. There is also improvement on academic performance (Buntain-Ricklefs, Cook, Low, & Smolkowski, 2015). Second Step provides parents with *The Family Guide to*

Second Step. With parental involvement, behavioral changes are more likely to happen at home, as well as at school. Other opportunities for parents to become involved are also provided, such as a one-night overview and take-home videos (Frey et al., 2000). With families and school working together, using common language and strategies from Second Step, children are more likely to become socially and emotionally competent.

Application

Social emotional development in a young child is vital to ensuring a successful outcome in life. All children need to engage in activities that promote social skills. Children who are not socially emotionally competent are at risk for challenging behavior in childhood and adulthood. Early childhood educators have the opportunity to promote social skills in the classroom everyday.

Early childhood teachers can promote social emotional skills in the classroom by providing children with a safe, nurturing, and predictable environment. Creating an environment where children feel valued and independent is important. Social emotional skills will be promoted naturally by allowing children ample time to interact with one another through child-led play, including recess. If young children do not develop social emotional competence, it will be hard for them to have academic success. They may also exhibit challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Some specific ways that early childhood teachers can provide an appropriate environment is by intentionally teaching classroom expectations in a respectful way. For instance, at the beginning of the school year, children can help develop rules and expectations. By having children involved in this process, they are more likely to take ownership over them and want to meet those expectations. Another way to support consistent expectations in a predictable environment is through the use of visual supports. Young children need to understand the pattern of their school day, so they are not feeling unsure about what is coming next. One way to help with this is to incorporate a daily visual schedule. This schedule should be posted in the classroom and readily accessible to all children. Each part of the day is depicted using a picture. This allows children to know the activities throughout the day, decreasing any anxiety they may

have about the school day. When children feel safe and secure, it is easier for them to actively

participate in the classroom.

Children also feel valued and can become more independent when trusting, nurturing

relationships are formed. When teachers create these types of relationships, children's social-

emotional development benefits, along with their cognitive development (Funk & Ho, 2018).

According to Funk and Ho (2018), early childhood teachers can create trusting, nurturing

relationships with children by being warm affectionate and caring. Creating strong relationships

with students can begin even before the school year starts. Home visits are often used in early

childhood programs. Home visits provide families and children with an opportunity to meet and

engage with the teacher. These are conducted in the child's home. This is beneficial, as a child's

home is usually their safe, comfortable haven. During home visits, a teacher can visit with

families and get to know children by doing a fun activity with them. Once in the classroom,

relationships need to continue to form. Strong relationships with students and families correlate

with the development of social skills. If children feel safe in the classroom environment, they

will feel comfortable enough to gain independence.

Another important aspect of relationship building is between teachers and families.

Families are a child's first teacher. The teacher can gain insight into a child's preferences and

interests by communicating with families. One of the most important factors in social emotional

development is attachment with parents, especially mothers (Cooper et al., 2009). Parents and

caregivers of young children may have risk factors, which may effect a child's social emotional

development. This lack of development may cause children as young as 3 to exhibit challenging

behaviors (Cooper et al., 2009). Creating meaningful relationships with families will be

beneficial if their child begins exhibiting challenging behaviors. Families will be more willing to

work together to incorporate strategies to help the child. Family relationships can be fostered by having on-going, open communication. For instance, teachers can maintain a communication notebook. A communication notebook can go between school and home. Teachers can write a child's activities for the day and any situation that may have occurred. The families also have the opportunity to write back to the teacher. Many children come to school on a school bus and teachers do not have the opportunity to speak with families face to face. Communication notebooks are one way to communicate effectively with parents.

Early childhood teachers can contribute positively to a child's family. They can inform families of the importance of social emotional skills and how to promote them at home. Many parents may realize the importance of these skills, but may not know how to promote them. At home, parents can provide an environment with appropriate behavioral expectations. They can interact positively with their child and encourage their child to do the same with others. Early childhood teachers can provide families with strategies to use at home and encourage them to use them with consistency. Early childhood teachers can also work together with families by informing them of expectations in the classroom. These things can be communicated through a weekly or monthly newsletter. Activities, which promote social emotional development, can be suggested on a monthly calendar. Newsletters and calendars sent home periodically help the relationship between teachers and families.

Recently, some things have gotten in the way of social emotional development being a focus in the early childhood classroom. Many classrooms are focusing more on academic success of young children. Some teachers are forgetting how social emotional competency can lead to higher academic achievement. Early childhood teachers need to stay current on the trends and issues related to young children. Academic achievement in early childhood is becoming more of

a focus by policymakers. By providing developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for young children, this achievement will still happen. Early childhood teachers need to remain focused on how children learn best and not give into the pressure of academic pushdown.

Technology has become more prevalent in our educational system in recent years. More classrooms are using technology as a teaching strategy. Early childhood classrooms are able to incorporate technology into play. By doing so, social emotional development is still being promoted. Young children are exposed to technology very early. If technology is used as a teaching tool, some social skills can be promoted. These include cooperation, independence, motivation and self-esteem (McCarrick & Xiaoming, 2007). Early childhood teachers need to remain cognizant of the time that children spend on technological devices and the time spent interacting with adults and peers.

Allowing children free play, including recess, is essential in promoting social emotional development. Early childhood teachers can provide free, unstructured play daily. As recess time for young children diminishes, so does the time for children to interact socially. Early childhood teachers need to research information about the effects of minimizing recess time. So many valuable skills are being developed during this time. Recess provides children with necessary, unstructured time to interact with their peers. By providing this time, they will be able to focus better in the classroom.

Young children also need free time in the classroom. Children should have the opportunity to make choices in their play. Early childhood classrooms can provide these choices by maintaining center areas. These center areas can include Block Center, Dramatic Play Center, Art Center, Reading Center, Science Center, and Math & Literacy Center. By providing a variety of learning activities and materials, children will be focused and engaged. By engaging in a

variety of activities and materials, all developmental domains will be promoted, including social-

emotional. Through unstructured play children learn to negotiate, take turns, problem-solve and

self-regulate. These are all important skills young children need in order to be successful in the

classroom and in life. Parents, caregivers, teachers and any other stakeholders need to understand

the necessity of social emotional skills and how to promote them in early childhood.

Conclusion and Future Studies

Social emotional competence is essential for a young child to develop in order to be a successful adult. Social emotional skills include goal setting, empathy, responsible decision-making, confidence, concentration, persistence, effective communication and problem solving, among others (Durlak & Weissberg, 2001; Fettig et al., 2012). More early childhood classrooms are placing their focus on academic achievement rather than social emotional development. It is important to note that children are more likely to exhibit challenging behaviors if they do not have social emotional competency. Social emotional skills can be embedded into the classroom throughout the day. There are also social emotional learning programs available for early childhood classrooms. Many of these provide activities to intentionally teach social emotional skills. Some of these also contain a family component. By being intentional about teaching social emotional skills, young children will be more likely to become competent in these skills, exhibit less challenging behaviors and be more successful as adults.

Although much research has been done on the topic of social emotional development, further investigation needs to be done. There is still a lack of consensus on the effects of technology on social emotional development. Research findings have concluded both that technology is detrimental to social emotional development and that technology can promote social emotional development (McCarrick & Xiaoming, 2007). Przybylski and Weinstein (2019) discuss that the research done on the correlation between digital media and a child's development is lacking. It is not proven that limiting digital media would have positive effects on their development. Social media is another avenue that needs further research.

Social emotional programs have been discussed and three such programs have been reviewed at length. Further research in this area needs to be done using longitudinal studies.

Long-range studies need to be conducted on how social emotional development, or the lack of,

affects mental health in adults. Mental health is currently a focal point in our society. Many

adults suffer from mental health issues. It would be interesting to have followed these adults

since childhood to find out how socially emotionally competent they were in their younger years.

By implementing a social emotional program in an early childhood classroom, more children are

likely to become socially competent adults.

Many studies have been done concerning the correlation between social emotional

development and the limit on recess and free time at school and at home. Garner, Murray, and

Ramstetter (2010) cited many types of studies and the key findings from each. All of the key

findings supported providing recess time. Even with all of the evidence from these studies, the

amount of recess time continues to be limited in the United States (Chang & Coward, 2015;

Garner et al., 2010). Policy makers and educators need to be aware of this research and base their

decisions off of these findings.

Despite the lack of research in some areas regarding social emotional development, it is

apparent that it is crucial for young children. An early childhood classroom needs to be a safe,

nurturing environment for a young child. The environment can create a space conducive to the

development of social emotional skills. Early childhood teachers and policymakers need to be

aware of all of the benefits associated with developing a child's social emotional skills. If

children become competent in the area of social-emotional development, they will grow to be

successful adults (Durlak & Weissberg, 2011).

References

Almon, J., Carlsson-Paige, N., & McLaughlin, G. (2015). Reading instruction in Kindergarten:

Little to gain and much to lose. *Alliance for Childhood* and *Defending the Early Years,* 1-

11.

Arda, T. & Ocak, S. (2012). Social competence and promoting alternative thinking

strategies – PATHS Preschool Curriculum. *Educational Sciences: Theory &*

Practice, 12(4), 2691-2698.

Ashdown, D. & Bernard, M. (2011). Can explicit instruction in social and emotional

learning skills benefit the social-emotional development, well-being, and academic

achievement of young children? *Early Childhood Education Journal, 39*(6), 397-405.

Baylor, A. & Kim, Y. (2006). A social-cognitive framework for pedagogical agents as

learning companions. *Educational Technology, Research and Development, 54*(6),

569-596.

Benedict, E., Horner, R., & Squires, J. (2007). Assessment and implementation of

positive behavior support in preschools. *Topics in Early Childhood Education, 27*(3),

174-192.

Bloodworth, M., Graczyk, P., Payton, J., Wardlaw, D., & Weissberg, R. (2000). Social and

emotional learning: A framework for promoting mental health and reducing risk behavior

in children and youth. *The Journal of School Health, 70*   (5), 179-185.

Bohn, C. & Pellegrini, A. (2005). The role of recess in children's cognitive performance and

school adjustment. *Educational Researcher, 34*(1), 13-19.

Brooks, A-M., Coyne, I., Hanafin, S., McDonnel, F., & Rouine, H. (2009). A whole-child

    perspective assessment guide for early years settings. *Community Practitioner, 82*(10),

    22-25.

Broyles, L., Fox, L., Hemmeter, M., & Jack, S. (2007). A program-wide model of positive

    behavior support in early childhood settings. *Journal of Early Intervention, 29*(4), 337-

    355.

Buntain-Ricklefs, J., Cook, C., Low, S., & Smolkowski, K. (2015). Promoting social-

    emotional competence: An evaluation of the elementary version of Second Step. *Journal

    of School Psychology, 53*(6), 463-477.

Chang, R. & Coward, F. (2015). More recess time, please! *Phi Delta Kappan, 97*(3), 14-17.

Cooper, J., Masi, R. & Vick, J. (2009). *Social-emotional development in early childhood: What

    every policymaker should know*. Columbia University: National Center for Children in

    Poverty.

Cortes, R., Domitrovich, C., & Greenberg, M. (2007). Improving young children's social and

    emotional competence: A randomized trial of the preschool "PATHS" curriculum. *The

    Journal of Primary Prevention, 28*(2), 67-91.

DeVries, R. (1997). Piaget's social theory. *Educational Researcher, 26*(2), 4-17.

Domitrovich, C., Durlak, J., Staley, K., & Weissberg, R. (2017). Social-emotional

    competence: An essential factor for promoting positive adjustment and reducing risk in

    school children. *Child Development, 88*(2), 408-416.

Durlak, J., Dymnicki, A., Schellinger, K., Taylor, R., & Weissberg, R. (2011). The impact

    of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based

    universal intervention. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405-432.

Durlak, J. & Weissberg, R. (2011). Promoting social and emotional development is an

      essential part of students' education. *Human Development, 54*(1), 1-3.

Easton, F. (1997). Educating the whole child, "head, heart, and hands": Learning from the

      Waldorf Experience. *Theory Into Practice, 36*(2), 87-94.

Edgerton, C., Graham, S., Kelly, B., Robertson, E., & Syme, B. (2015). Parents and the

      Preschool PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum. *Journal of*

      Children's Services, 10(3), 231-241.

Fettig, A., Santos, R., & Shaffer, L. (2012). Helping families connect early literacy with social-

      emotional development. *Young Children, 67*(2), 88-93.

Frey, K., Guzzo, B., & Hirschstein, M. (2000). Second Step: Preventing aggression by promoting

      social competence. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 8*(2), 102-112.

Funk, S. & Ho, J. (2018). Promoting young children's social and emotional health. *Young*

      Children, 73(1), 1-19.

Garner, A., Murray, R., & Ramastetter. (2010). The crucial role of recess in schools. *Journal of*

      School Health, 80(11), 517-526.

Graue, E. (2009). Reimagining Kindergarten. *The Education Digest, 75*(7), 28-34.

Harmon, F. & Viruru, R. (2018). Debunking the myth of the efficacy of "push-down

      academics": How rigid, teacher-centered, academic early learning environments

      disempower young children. *Journal of Family Strengths, 18*(1), 1-11.

Heishman, A. & Kochhar-Bryant, C. (2010). *Effective collaboration for educating the whole*

      child. USA: Corwin. Retrieved from https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-

      binaries/34869_Kochhar_Bryant__Effective_Collaboration_for_Educating_the_

      Whole_Child_Ch1.pdf.

Hsin, C., Li, M., & Tsai, C. (2014). The influence of young children's use of technology on their

    learning: A review. *Educational Technology & Society, 17* (4), 85-99.

McCarrick, K. & Xiaoming, L. (2007). Buried treasure: The impact of computer use on young

    children's social, cognitive, language development and motivation. *AACE Journal,*

    15(1), 73-95.

Przybylski, A. & Weinstein, N. (2019). Digital screen time limits and young children's

    psychological well-being: Evidence from a population-based study. *Child Development,*

    9(1), e56-e65.