Emotion Socialization in Schools

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1 Emotional Competence and Emotion Socialization

Emotional competence is a general term used to describe an individual's abilities to perceive and interpret their feelings, to regulate and manage strong feelings, and to understand and empathize with the feelings of others (Denham, 1998). These abilities develop as part of a broader set of core social and emotional competencies described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as central to educating hearts, inspiring minds, and helping people navigate the world more effectively (CASEL, 2017). In the CASEL model, *self-awareness* involves the ability to identify one's own feelings and emotions, and *self-management* is the ability to effectively regulate and manage these feelings. These competencies develop in ways that are intertwined with other core social–emotional skills, including *social awareness* (e.g., the ability to be active and aware of one's behaviors and social context), *relationship skills* (e.g., the ability to initiate and maintain healthy relationships), and *responsible decision making* (e.g., the ability to make healthy choices about one's own behavior and interactions).

Differential emotions theory (Izard, 2009) provides a foundation for understanding the central role of emotional development in these multiple areas of personal and social functioning. This theory posits that emotions serve the primary function of motivating and organizing human thought and action. Emotions develop through the dynamic interaction of neurobiological activity (e.g., arousal) and cognition, as individuals learn to identify and interpret their emotional arousal and to use those interpretations to guide their responses. Over the life course, experiences affect exposure to emotional arousal, and shape the way in which individuals come to perceive, interpret, and respond, gradually forming habitual and enduring patterns of emotional functioning that define their personality (Izard, 2009). The development of emotional competence begins in infancy, influenced by temperament and early caregiving experiences. This entry focuses on development that occurs later in childhood, which is influenced by the socialization processes that children experience in the school setting.

When children enter school, they face a number of new social, behavioral, and learning demands. At school, children are expected to play fairly, get along with others, develop friendships, and work collaboratively with peers. In addition, teachers want children to follow rules, to listen and learn, and to persist in challenging learning

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tasks. A supportive school context provides opportunities and supports for children's emotional growth, helping children successfully meet these demands and to develop caring relationships with their teachers and peers. Additional demands and skills emerge as children progress through elementary school from early to late childhood; adaptive navigation of these demands hinges upon emotional development. For example, around age 8, children begin to make social comparisons, assessing how they and others compare in areas of valued accomplishments. Corresponding emotions include pride, SHAME, and GUILT, which contribute to self-appraisal and can motivate mastery striving (see ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION DURING CHILDHOOD) or, alternatively, undermine self-efficacy, depending upon child experiences and emotional functioning (Izard, 2009). Similarly, the ability to take the perspective of another and view problems from multiple points of view develops during middle childhood. This capacity is fostered by the emotional growth that occurs with positive socialization supports. For example, in conflict situations, children who have learned to regulate their anger and to empathize with peers, taking their perspective, are more able to negotiate and solve problems peacefully. In these core areas of development, a child's functioning depends upon their growing capacity to understand, express, and regulate their emotions. The following sections review two prominent domains in which schools affect children's emotional development and functioning (teacher–student interactions and peer relationships; see also EMOTION SOCIALIZATION IN PEER GROUPS), discuss their influence on emotion socialization, and identify evidence-based programs in each of these domains.

2 Teacher Influences on Emotion Socialization

There are two primary ways in which teachers influence the emotional development and adjustment of their students: (1) through the quality of the relationships they form with students and the emotional support they provide and (2) through the strategies they use to manage emotions and behaviors in the classroom.

Teacher–Student Relationship Quality

A high-quality teacher–student relationship is characterized by low levels of conflict, high levels of closeness and support, and frequent, consistent interactions with students. When teachers frequently interact with their students in warm and responsive ways, a classroom is considered high in emotional support. In emotionally supportive relationships, children feel accepted and liked by their teacher, and comfortable seeking advice and support. Conceptually, high-quality and emotionally supportive student–teacher relationships provide a strong foundation for emotional development because they promote feelings of emotional security, increasing children's feelings of emotional safety and self-worth in the school setting (Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999). Empirically, multiple studies show links between positive teacher–student relationships and child adjustment to school, social skill development, social competence, behavior, and academic performance. For example, in one study, the quality of relationship that kindergarten students formed with their teachers predicted later growth in academic skills, learning behaviors, and behavior problems through eighth grade, controlling for their baseline cognitive skills and behaviors (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Conversely,

elementary school teachers' conflict with students predicts later behavior problems, learning problems, and grade retention.

Managing Emotions and Behaviors in the Classroom

Classroom management processes refer to the ways in which teachers organize their behavioral expectations, support positive and appropriate classroom behaviors, and reduce inappropriate or disruptive behaviors (Bradshaw, 2014). Substantial research has illuminated positive classroom management practices that support cooperative social interaction, increase child engagement in learning, and improve children's feelings of comfort and inclusion (Brophy, 2006). These include establishing clear, positive expectations; instituting routines to support self-regulation; reinforcing appropriate behaviors and motivated learning efforts; and using redirection and nonpunitive, logical consequences to correct inappropriate behaviors. Teachers can maximize student comfort and emotional support when they use these positive classroom management strategies to create a predictable, warm, and nonthreatening classroom context.

The way in which teachers respond to problem behaviors is also of critical importance, particularly for vulnerable children who are frequently disengaged or disruptive at school (Brophy, 2006). Behavior problems can occur when children are unable to manage their emotions and behaviors. Consider this example in a second-grade classroom: James and his neighbor Emily are working on math problems. Emily is stuck and wants James's help, so she pokes him repeatedly with her pencil. James ignores her at first, but after several minutes he stands up, throws back his chair, turns to Emily, and begins yelling. One teacher's response may be to focus on negative consequences for problem behaviors, telling James to sit down and to continue working and instructing Emily to stop poking. While this manages James's outburst and Emily's annoying behavior, it does not help James or Emily develop better skills to regulate their emotions.

Rather than punishing inappropriate behavior, a positive discipline approach encourages teachers and schools to employ a consistent and proactive system for managing behavior that is geared toward promoting children's self-regulation of emotions and behavior (Bradshaw, 2014). This approach has roots in social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn through instruction and observing others, and in behaviorism, which theorizes that new behaviors are learned through reinforcement. Correspondingly, setting classroom expectations early in the school year, ensuring that these are clearly conveyed to students, teaching desired behaviors, and modeling appropriate procedures are used to promote children's abilities to self-regulate their behaviors and emotions in the classroom.

Under this positive discipline approach, at the start of the year, James's teacher would have established expectations that students do not touch others without their permission, or yell at others. Students would have practiced strategies for problem solving when issues do arise, including identifying their feelings, calming down, stating the problem, and considering solutions, and the teacher would have been modeling this behavior throughout the school year. With a teacher using this approach, both Emily and James would have been more prepared to manage the emotional distress they experienced in this interaction and, consequently, more able to choose appropriate behavioral responses.

Conceptually, the use of positive discipline strategies in the classroom provides a foundation for social and emotional learning to occur; these strategies promote the development of the skills, knowledge, and competencies that support self-awareness and self-management, as well as social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2017). These practices are most effective when they are embraced school-wide, such that all teachers set expectations and provide consistent supports for social–emotional growth and responses to problematic behaviors in the classroom, hallways, cafeteria, and playground (Bradshaw, 2014).

When emotionally supportive practices are embedded school-wide, they promote a positive school climate (CASEL, 2017). School and classroom climate are holistic concepts reflecting the interactions of all individuals within the school and classroom communities, respectively, and create a foundation for social–emotional growth by providing a safe educational, psychological, social, cognitive, and physical context. Empirical research has documented links between student outcomes and the quality of classroom and school climate, increasing the importance of these climate variables in models of school effectiveness (Thapa, Cohern, Higgins-D'Alessandro, & Guffe, 2012).

Interventions

Several intervention programs have proven effective at promoting positive teacher–student relationships and discipline approaches. For example, Responsive Classroom is a school-wide program with a primary focus on building a positive learning community. This program is theoretically grounded in the premise that social interactions, which hinge on skills such as cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and self-control, facilitate cognitive growth. Specific teacher practices are employed to promote social and emotional development, such as a daily Morning Meeting which builds positive teacher–student relationships by allocating time for teachers and students to check in every morning and practice interpersonal skills. Evaluations of the Responsive Classroom program demonstrate improvements in student perceptions of their school experiences and improved academic performance (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Similar to Responsive Classroom, My Teaching Partner is an intervention that focuses on promoting more positive teacher–student interactions in the classroom. In this program, teachers videotape themselves in the classroom and then review their tapes with coaches who provide personalized feedback to increase emotional support and positive classroom management strategies. In a randomized trial, preschool teachers assigned to My Teaching Partner with personalized coaching had more positive growth on all measured dimensions of teacher–student interaction quality than teachers without coaching. In addition to demonstrating the program's effectiveness, this study highlights the importance of personalized feedback, practice, and support in improving teachers' emotionally supportive interactions with students.

Taking another approach, several effective interventions train teachers to use specific strategies to enhance positive classroom management and improve social–emotional supports. For example, the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management program focuses on preventing behavior problems with proactive rules and routines; on reinforcing positive behaviors with teacher attention, praise, and incentives; and on promoting positive social interactions and problem solving with coaching. In a randomized control trial, independent observers coded teachers who used this program along with

a social–emotional learning curriculum as less harsh and critical, less inconsistent and permissive, and more warm and affectionate than teachers who had not received the program (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller, 2008). Independent observers rated students in intervention classes as more improved in emotional self-regulation, social competence, behavioral control, and learning engagement, reflecting the value of combining positive classroom management training with social–emotional skills instruction.

In contrast to Responsive Classroom, My Teaching Partner, and the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management interventions, the School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (SW-PBIS) model provides a *framework* for these interventions to be adopted by schools. Schools implementing SW-PBIS identify a list of school-wide expectations for student behavior that are taught to students and staff. A school-wide system is adopted to reward students for appropriate behavior and to respond to behavioral issues. This framework provides schools with the autonomy to identify their own expectations and adopt a reward system that will work best for their students. Students in schools that adopt this framework have fewer behavior and concentration problems, and more advanced social–emotional functioning and prosocial behavior (Bradshaw, 2014).

3 Peer Influences on Emotion Socialization

In addition to teachers, peers exert an important influence on emotional development and adjustment at school. The peer context is unique because children interact as equals, in contrast to other social relationships (e.g., with parents and teachers) in which children hold lower status and expect guidance and nurturance. The egalitarian context of peer interactions provides children with important opportunities for social learning and experience; peers model and reinforce desired social behaviors, shaping children's social skills to promote cooperation, sharing, helping, and other prosocial behaviors (Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009). Peer interactions also influence children's emotional understanding and expression, encouraging affective sharing and reinforcing (or undermining) feelings of acceptance and inclusion. Being included by others, getting along in a group setting, and forming friendships at school all directly promote feelings of security, belongingness, and self-efficacy, thus fostering positive emotional adjustment.

Peer influence on emotional development can be both positive and negative. At the level of the individual child, interactions with peers provide an intimate context for individuals to learn and practice social and emotional skills; in addition, larger peer group dynamics influence emotional development through phenomena unique to large groups, such as classroom norms. Schools strive to build individual students' emotional and social skills to promote positive peer relations at the individual and group level in order to create a context in which students provide social support to others and facilitate positive emotional adjustment.

Individual-Level Peer Interactions

Friendships are a unique type of relationship characterized by mutual acceptance and preference. Good friends engage in shared activities and offer help, companionship,

security, and emotional support (Rubin et al., 2009). Friendships give children the opportunity to develop the social–emotional skills that foster empathy, intimacy, and that enable them to provide emotional support that is expected as a friend. Children who are accepted by peers and form mutual friendships at school display more prosocial behavior and more positive conflict resolution than children who are socially isolated at school. Positive peer relationships and friendships in childhood are associated with higher self-confidence, less loneliness, fewer feelings of depression, higher involvement in school, and later academic achievement, as well as higher levels of self-worth in adulthood.

Conversely, children who enter school with underdeveloped competencies are at risk of negative peer interactions, including peer rejection (i.e., being disliked), and victimization (i.e., being picked on). Children who are rejected by peers often exhibit poor emotion regulation, high reactivity, aggression, and withdrawal (Rubin et al., 2009; see also PEER REJECTION AND DISLIKE). These children receive fewer opportunities to practice positive social and emotional skills, which limits the possibility of positive interactions in the future. Peer rejection is emotionally demoralizing, and contributes to low self-esteem, loneliness, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Chronic rejection, particularly when accompanied by difficulties regulating behavior and emotion predicts later delinquency, conduct disorders, attentional difficulties, and substance abuse.

Peer Group Dynamics and Emotion Socialization

Beyond the effects of individual student–student interaction, students are also part of the larger social network of the classroom. The larger social network includes small clusters of mutual friends (cliques) and larger groups of affiliated students (crowds). Social groups, including classroom groups, cliques, or crowds develop norms that characterize what is common and acceptable behavior, and influence the development of students' social and emotional beliefs and behavior. In addition, students vary in the amount of social status they hold, which dictates their position in the social hierarchy of the classroom. Bullying occurs when a high-status student consistently engages in aggressive behavior toward a victim of lower status.

Empirical studies have shown that in classrooms or other large social groups with strong antiaggression norms, where students believe that aggressive behavior is unacceptable, student aggression declines over time (Henry et al., 2000). For example, consider this conflict situation in a group of third graders during a game of four square. Amber believes that her ball hit inside the line, which means that she would win; her opponent, Stephen, believes that the ball hit outside the line, which would mean that he wins. The other players, along with students waiting to play, may hold group norms that value fairness and prosocial problem solving, and condemn aggression. If so, they may support peaceful conflict resolution. Alternatively, if the peer group is accepting of aggression, they may escalate the situation or take sides, leaping to Amber's defense, acting in outrage and anger, or throwing insults and punches at Stephen. In this case, Stephen may leave the situation afraid and dejected, while Amber retains her position in the match. These aggressive group norms reinforce poor emotion regulation and violence as a viable strategy to achieve the goal of staying in the game. Negative peer

influences can emerge as early as kindergarten, when aggressive children often befriend each other and reinforce disruptive and rule-breaking behavior.

Bullying is an example of a social problem that is affected by the behaviors and beliefs of the individuals involved (bully and victim) and that is also heavily influenced by the behaviors and beliefs of the larger peer group of bystanders. Bullies and victims alike often exhibit poor emotion regulation skills and other social difficulties that increase the likelihood that they will be involved in bullying interactions. In addition, bullying involves the display of coercive power that is used to demonstrate to an audience that an individual has power over another (Rodkin, 2011). As such, the reaction of the larger peer group is integral to the continuation or termination of the behavior.

Victims are often targeted because they are physically weak, lack prosocial skills, and have low self-worth and social competence. Chronically victimized children are particularly likely to be anxious, depressed, withdrawn, argumentative, disliked by peers, and in some cases vulnerable to suicidal thoughts (Rodkin, 2011). The peer group can reinforce this vulnerability by isolating and ignoring victimized children; alternatively, it can protect and support vulnerable children by standing up for them and repudiating bullying behaviors (Rubin et al., 2009). School-based interventions may promote positive peer relationships by helping individual children develop the social–emotional skills they need for high-quality friendships, and by focusing on the peer group to improve social inclusion and decrease social stratification and bullying.

Interventions to Promote Social–Emotional Skills

One way in which teachers and schools can facilitate positive peer interactions and promote healthy emotion socialization is by using evidence-based social–emotional learning (SEL) programs. Multiple SEL programs exist, with the strongest effects produced by programs that have undergone rigorous evaluations (for a list, see CASEL, 2017). As with positive discipline approaches, these programs are most successful when implemented consistently across the school setting. A meta-analysis that examined a variety of school-based SEL programs concluded that these programs have widespread effects; they are associated with improvements in prosocial behavior, reductions in emotional distress, reductions in conduct problems, and gains in academic achievement (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017).

Although effective programs vary in the structure of the specific lessons and activities involved, most focus on promoting skills for emotional understanding (e.g., identifying a child's own and others' feelings, awareness of the causes of different feelings, empathy), self-control (e.g., calming down when upset or excited, managing stress), positive social interaction and friendship (e.g., helping, sharing, cooperating), and interpersonal problem solving (e.g., identifying problems, generating alternative solutions, evaluating the consequences of different choices; Denham, 1998).

The design of SEL programs is grounded in social learning theory, in which new competencies are acquired through direct experience and by observing others. Social–emotional concepts are taught (using instruction, demonstration, discussion, and modeling), then practiced and reinforced. As such, these programs typically include lessons in which teachers introduce skill concepts using modeling, instruction, and discussion, followed by activities designed to help children practice the skill with feedback and positive reinforcement. To promote generalization, teachers are

encouraged to provide additional opportunities for students to apply these skills in other contexts, such as the playground and cafeteria. All school adults, including teachers, principals, librarians, and janitors, have the ability and responsibility to model appropriate behaviors and social interactions.

A good example of an effective SEL program is Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), aimed at preschool through elementary grades (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, & Quamma, 1995). This teacher-implemented curriculum explicitly teaches social and emotional skills, focusing on increasing children's ability to: (1) discuss emotions, (2) utilize a large emotion vocabulary, and (3) use strategies to manage strong feelings by calming down and assessing the problem. Teachers first present direct instruction on these topics, and this is followed by student activities including role-playing, class discussion, and social and self-reinforcement. Teachers and peers model appropriate behaviors, and teachers are provided with generalization techniques to help facilitate the application of these skills to different parts of school life. In randomized control trials, PATHS was found to have promoted increases in students' emotional understanding and expression skills, along with adaptive problem-solving skills, and also to have fostered decreases in aggressive norms (Greenberg et al., 1995). Teachers also reported fewer instances of aggression, conduct, and behavior problems.

Second Step is another teacher-led SEL program for preschool to middle school students. This program focuses on promoting empathy, helping children manage anger, and promoting flexible social problem-solving skills. As in PATHS, lessons involve direct instruction, illustrations, classroom activities, group discussions, self-reflection, performance, and reinforcement of target-appropriate behaviors. In a randomized trial, students in Second Step were less physically aggressive, exhibited more friendly and prosocial behavior, and reported higher levels of social competence and lower levels of antisocial behavior than students who had not received the intervention (Taub, 2001).

Interventions Targeting Peer Group Dynamics

In addition to interventions designed to promote social–emotional skill building, some school-based interventions are designed to influence peer group dynamics and peer norms. As described in this section, some of these programs focus on promoting positive peer support (e.g., Good Behavior Game) and others focus more explicitly on reducing negative peer processes such as bullying (e.g., KiVa). In addition, teachers may use a set of strategies to informally manage peer dynamics.

The Good Behavior Game is designed to promote positive classroom behaviors by increasing peer group support for collaborative, prosocial, and on-task behavior. The program begins with the generation of classroom goals by identifying appropriate and inappropriate classroom behaviors. Teachers group students into teams, and the teams compete to see which of them can collect the most points for positive classroom behavior. Teams win by completing timed rounds without losing points for inappropriate classroom behaviors. This program employs principles from applied behavioral analysis to the peer context, as team members are rewarded for encouraging each other to follow classroom rules. This group reward structure encourages students to work together to create a positive social and academic climate. In randomized trials, the Good Behavior Game has reduced rates of classroom aggression and shy behavior, increased

on-task behavior as rated by independent observers, and reduced conduct problems and antisocial behavior (Poduska & Kurki, 2014).

The Good Behavior Game groups students into teams and then uses group reinforcement to enhance positive peer support within teams. Similarly, cooperative learning programs use student groups to enhance positive peer reinforcement. Cooperative learning was initially used in response to school segregation to encourage cross-racial interactions, but has since been applied to promote positive social relationships between any groups of students. In this technique, teachers intentionally create a learning group of mixed students (Black and White; boys and girls; popular and rejected individuals), and task them with learning new material. As in the Good Behavior Game, teachers give rewards based on the performance of the group, such that it is in the best interests of each group to help, support, and teach one another. This type of structured, incentivized, and positive social interaction has positive effects on intergroup relations, self-concept, behavior, and student achievement.

Another intervention approach designed to change peer norms is illustrated by the KiVa program, which tackles the peer dynamics associated with bullying. Through student lessons and role play, the program aims to cultivate empathy and to encourage bystanders to support victims, to promote group norms that disapprove of bullying, and to prepare adults to intervene when bullying occurs. A randomized trial of 78 schools found the intervention reduced self- and peer-reported victimization and self-reported bullying, and resulted in less peer assistance and reinforcement of the bully. The program also promotes positive perceptions of the peer group, school liking, academic motivation, and academic performance (Salmivalli & Poskiparta, 2012).

Another way in which teachers manage peer dynamics involves their everyday teaching practices. Managing social status dynamics involves fostering a more egalitarian status system in the classroom. For example, teachers may observe a hierarchy in the classroom peer group in which a few students are very popular and a few are isolated and left out. In order to promote more egalitarian peer relations, a teacher may highlight the value of diverse skills and accomplishments or showcase the abilities of low-status students. Teachers may also create opportunities for isolated students to work with other prosocial peers, or work to extend the friendship networks of students whose existing friendships are highly conflict ridden or cliquish.

Research has begun to emerge that indicates that teachers who are sensitive to and who make efforts to positively manage classroom social dynamics produce more positive classroom peer groups and have classes that are characterized by lower levels of aggression and victimization and by more positive patterns of perceptions of classmates over time (Gest, Madill, Zadzora, Miller, & Rodkin, 2014). Teachers may strategically use seating charts to this end; evidence suggests that structuring seating charts to manage social network dynamics improves likability and reduces problem behaviors (van den Berg, Segers, & Cillessen, 2012).

4 Conclusion

Schools play an important role in the emotional socialization of students, affecting students' emotional and social development and future adjustment. Within schools, teachers can provide emotional support to students and create an emotionally

supportive classroom climate through the quality of the relationships that they build with students and the strategies that they use to manage student emotions and behaviors. In addition, peers shape children's emotional experiences at school. Not only do students learn from the larger peer group, but friendships provide a context for students to develop more complex social and emotional skills, such as intimacy, loyalty, and social problem solving. Schools, in general, and teachers, in particular, can facilitate positive peer networks and positive peer experiences by implementing evidence-based SEL programs and strategies that teach social–emotional skills and foster positive peer responding. School experiences that build social–emotional competencies and provide children with social support from teachers and peers contribute to children's emotional well-being, behavioral adjustment, and academic achievement in ways that last far beyond the school years.

SEE ALSO: Emotion Socialization in Peer Groups; Engagement and Motivation During Childhood; Peer Rejection and Dislike

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