Introduction to Social Emotional Learning: 4 Competencies

Overview

Success in school and in life depends on more than academic ability alone. Rigorous longitudinal research has demonstrated that specific competencies—such as **growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness**—have a significant impact on students' academic performance and persistence in school as well as their broader life success, as measured by a variety of health, wealth, and well-being indicators in adulthood. These interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies predict grades throughout K-12 as strongly as IQ does, and they predict performance in the workforce more strongly than IQ does. U.S. News and World Report indicates that skills such as social awareness, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy are in particularly high demand by employers. Further, studies have demonstrated that strength in these areas is correlated with such long-term outcomes as higher employment rates and wages, as well as lower risk of substance abuse, obesity, and criminal activity.[i]

Growth Mindset: Students with a *fixed mindset* believe that their own intelligence and talent are innate traits that don't change. For example, they might say, "I just can't learn math." These students typically worry about not looking smart, get upset by mistakes, and give up sooner on tough tasks. Students with a *growth mindset* believe that ability can change as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice. They frequently say, "Math is hard, but if I keep trying, I can get better at it." Students with a growth mindset see mistakes as ways to learn, embrace challenges, and persist in the face of setbacks.[ii]

Why this matters: Whether or not students are aware of their mindset, a broad body of research has shown that what they believe about their own intelligence can affect their effort, engagement, motivation, and achievement as measured by test scores, school grades, passing rate in post-secondary education, and other metrics.[iii]

Sample growth mindset survey questions:

How true are the following about you:

- My intelligence is something that I can't change very much (reverse coded)
- Challenging myself won't make me any smarter (reverse coded)
- There are some things I am not capable of learning (reverse coded)
- If I am not naturally smart in a subject, I will never do well in it (reverse coded)

Self-Management: Self-management, which is also referred to as "self-control" or "self-regulation," is the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, delaying gratification, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals.[iv] Students with strong self-management skills arrive to class prepared, pay attention, follow directions, allow others to speak without interruption, and work independently with focus.

Why this matters: Self-control in children as young as age 5 can predict important life outcomes such as high school completion, physical health, income, single parenthood, substance dependence, and criminal involvement.[v]

Sample self management survey questions:

Please answer how often you did the following. During this grading period…

- I came to class prepared.
- I remembered and followed directions.
- I allowed others to speak without interruption.
- I worked independently with focus.

Self-Efficacy: Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. An internal belief, self-efficacy is related to whether a student believes that s/he has sufficient control over his/her environment in order to succeed. High self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and environment and allows students to become advocates for their own needs and supports.

Why this matters: Decades of research show that self-efficacy is a valid predictor of students' motivation and learning.[vi] Students with high levels of self-efficacy participate more in class, work harder, persist longer, and have fewer adverse emotional reactions when encountering difficulties than students with lower self-efficacy.[vii] High self-efficacy can also motivate students to use specific learning strategies and to engage in self-directed learning.[viii]

Sample self efficacy survey questions:

How confident are you about the following at school:

- I can earn an A in my classes
- I can do well on all my tests, even when they're difficult
- I can master the hardest topics in my classes
- I can meet all the learning goals my teachers set

Social Awareness: Social Awareness is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.[ix]

Why this matters: Social awareness is a crucial component of appropriate classroom behavior, which contributes to an environment conducive to learning. Social awareness is also widely established as an important factor in workforce success. One recent employer survey conducted by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills demonstrates that four of the five most important skills for high school graduates entering the work force are linked to social awareness: professionalism, collaboration, communication, and social responsibility.[x]

Sample social awareness survey questions:

- When others disagree with you, how respectful are you of their views?
- When people are already talking together, how easy is it for you to join the group?
- When you have problems at school, how easily can you find ways to solve them?
- To what extent are you able to stand up for yourself without putting others down?

[i] Heckman, Stixrud, Urzua (2006) The Effects of Cognitive and Noncognitive Abilities on Labor Market Outcomes and Social Behavior; Moffit, et al. (2011) A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety.

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[iv] CASEL.org (http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies/)

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[viii] Zimmerman, B. J., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1990). Student differences in self-regulated learning: Relating grade, sex, and giftedness to self-efficacy and strategy use. *Journal of educational Psychology*, *82*(1), 51; Zimmerman, B. J., Bandura, A., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1992). Self-motivation for academic attainment: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting. *American educational research journal*, *29*(3), 663-676.

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[x] Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century US Workforce*. Partnership for 21st Century Skills. 1 Massachusetts Avenue NW Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001.