



sometimes find these children difficult to interact with, and may want to avoid them. Yet teachers must recognize that socially isolated children need their help the most. With systematic support and intentional teaching, teachers can promote children’s development of social competence.

If children’s problems are ignored or set aside because teachers hope “they’ll grow out of it,” the problems only get worse as children get older. Teachers can instead adopt a proactive approach, such as this one:

Preschool teacher Karen Hagey observed that every time 3½-year-old Marcus tried to push his way into the block corner, the other children shouted, “Get out, Marcus! You can’t play.” She thought about forcing the children to accept Marcus, but realized they would resent him, and he would be humiliated by her interference. Instead, Karen quietly coached Marcus on strategies for entering play: “Let’s sit next to Jason and see if you and I can build a tall tower.” Marcus’s tower soon eclipsed that of his peers, who started to pay attention to his skill. After a few days of this kind of assistance from Karen, Marcus entered the play area more calmly and Jason said, “Hey, Marcus, help me make my building as tall as me.”

Promote Academic Success Social–emotional competence is clearly linked to academic success throughout all the years of school (Curby, Brown, Bassett, & Denham, 2015; Bettencourt, Gross & Ho, 2016). Children in preschool and the primary grades perform better on measures of academic achievement, language, and social–emotional development when they have positive, sensitive, trusting relationships with their teachers (Hamre, 2014). Relationships with teachers predict children’s later relationships with their peers, self-regulation, behavior problems, school satisfaction, and learning (Brock & Curby, 2016; Graziano, Garb, Ros, Hart & Garcia, 2015; Williford et al., 2017).

Vygotsky’s theory of learning as a social construction of knowledge emphasizes that much of our understanding occurs as we talk with and listen to other people’s ideas. This give and take of conversation and debate with other people plays a major role in learning. Promoting social construction of knowledge requires that children learn not just as individuals but also in the context of small and large groups—as part of a community of learners. We now have a large body of research to guide teachers in this important work.

The Teaching Pyramid Model

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children disseminate resources to teachers that translate research on social–emotional development into best practice. CSEFEL developed a model—the *Teaching Pyramid*—for promoting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children, which is depicted in Figure 8.1. **Challenging behavior** is defined as “any behavior that interferes with children’s learning, development, and success at play; is harmful to the child, other children, or adults; and/or puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure” (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2017).

Pyramid Components The Teaching Pyramid is composed of four parts: (1) positive relationships with children, (2) high-quality supportive environments, (3) social and emotional teaching strategies, and (4) intensive individualized interventions. The base of the pyramid is the largest portion because it represents the foundation of positive relationships on which everything else depends. Each subsequent topic on the pyramid builds on the ones below and represents a proportionately smaller amount of teachers’ time and effort. This model indicates that if teachers effectively provide these supports, children will learn social competence, their positive behaviors will increase, and challenging behaviors will diminish.

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