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Social-Emotional Learning and Resiliency Amongst Middle School Students

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Abstract

The article addresses the interpretation and examination of theories based on social-emotional intelligence and resiliency by theorists Erikson, Bandura, and Goleman. Comparisons of the perspectives show the interrelation of social-emotional intelligence and resiliency with an evaluation of further implications for use in education. The influence of the article is to improve the human and social conditions of education to provide adolescents with worthy and meaningful opportunities to learn through social-emotional intelligence and resiliency. Through social-emotional intelligence and resiliency, institutions focus on creating well-adapted adults that are able to use strategies that assist with cognitive, psychological, social, moral, and biological positive growth to prepare students for 21st century competencies.

Key Words: Emotional Learning, Resiliency, Middle School

Introduction

Students do not enter the classroom as blank slates. Rather they have engaged in experiences, altered their thinking, and developed cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally prior to entering the classroom. The young adolescent, while adjusting to puberty, is also combating identity, family, and personal crises. In addition, the early adolescent seeks to understand themselves and asks for others to respect their individuality and growth. Differentiation is a necessary component to classroom instruction to respect student individuality and growth. However, differentiation should be more than instruction. For middle grade learners, differentiation involves understanding, building, and sustaining identity, self-efficacy, and emotional and social intelligences. As students build on social-emotional identities, they grow in emotional, cognitive, behavior, and social areas that are necessary for teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving.

Social-Emotional Identities

Erik Erikson's (1980) text *Identity and the life cycle* provides an in-depth analysis into how children from birth develop into the adults they are today. Either those adults have a sense of identity, thus a strong sense of self-efficacy and resiliency, or the adults have weakened identities that lead into a poor sense of self-efficacy and the disability of withstanding challenges. Albert Bandura (1997) in his text *Self-Efficacy: The exercise of control* correlates directly to Erikson's (1980) concept of identity. Daniel Goleman (1995 & 2006) analyzes identity, self-efficacy, resiliency, learning, relationships, and neurological decision-making processes to develop the concepts of emotional intelligence and social literacy. Emotional intelligence allows the individual to manage emotions in effective and meaningful methods rather than allowing emotions to overwhelm, inhibit, or create unhealthy personas. Social literacy develops from the concept of emotional intelligence and demonstrates how an individual's environment can influence, both positively and negatively, biological and social well-being.

Identity

Constructed from our biological hardwiring and our environmental influences, the human identity develops. Upon birth, the chemical womb no longer exists and the child enters the social exchange system of society that will determine limitations and opportunities (Erikson, 1980). There are three stages of the identity process in childhood: trust, autonomy, and initiative. Erikson (1980) suggests that a healthy personality begins with basic trust and develops based on experiences within the child's first years. Without the basic foundations of identity, the middle grades learner may struggle through adolescence.

Developing basic trust requires a mutual regulation between the parent and the child (Erikson, 1980). According to Erikson, mutual regulation requires that when a child is in need of a changing, a feeding, desires holding, that he or she will gain that opportunity from a secure base. If basic trust is not established, the infant then develops a sense of basic mistrust and may find it difficult to gain trust in other relationships due to the poor sense of trust as an infant. During the stage of autonomy, the child begins to struggle with and finally understand retention and elimination (Erikson, 1980). Within this mode, the child begins to struggle with how to maintain self-control without losing self-esteem from the ambiguity he or she receives from parents or other adults in leadership positions (Erikson, 1980). Without the initial stage of trust, the child begins to doubt, feel shameful, and fearful to attempt challenging tasks. The middle grades educator has the responsibility of developing trust and allowing for autonomy.

Allowing exploration in the middle grades classroom leads to gaining confidence that ultimately develops into greater awareness of self and independence. If initiatives and independence are thwarted at any stage throughout the child's development, the child then begins to develop guilt. Guilt develops from the sense of failure from not fulfilling expectations during the stage of dependency. During the collaborative nature of imagination and play, a child understands the purpose of developing products together that lead to developing the fundamental values of independency.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an important factor, according to Bandura (1997), that promotes motivation and behavior, and influences actions that affect an individual's life that "refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). Self-efficacy is the motivation, esteem, and productivity that is desired in adolescent students. Self-efficacy increases by producing effective, meaningful, and significant pieces of information or products. Self-efficacy, according to the definition, becomes a factor that promotes individual achievement (Bandura, 1997). When an individual feels as if they cannot complete a task, they become demotivated and do not accomplish the goal that is set forth. On the other hand, an individual that is strongly motivated will have the drive and force to complete and accomplish effectively the goal they have established for themselves.

There are four sources of efficacy: the mastery of experience, social modeling, social persuasion, and psychological responses (Bandura, 1997). The teacher becomes the model and initiator of the sources of efficacy. When performing challenging tasks well, Bandura (1997) suggests that the individual has a higher sense of self-worth, thus increasing self-efficacy. Bandura also found that observing others complete similar challenging tasks with similar backgrounds promotes increased self-efficacy within ourselves. By watching others, we believe that we can accomplish the same. Social persuasion assists the individual to accomplish challenging tasks with motivational conversations, scenarios, or other forms of encouragement (Bandura, 1997). Encouragement assists the individual to attempt to accomplish the challenging task in an effort to please the other person. Psychological responses also dictate the reactions individuals have to different situations (Bandura, 1997). An individual who is anxious and fearful about completing a task results in poor effectiveness and productivity, while those who are joyful and confident are more apt to complete a task effectively.

Emotional Intelligence

There are families of emotions that reveal themselves in our neural capacities and outwardly behavior. Those emotions are anger, sadness, fear, enjoyment, love, surprise, disgust, and shame. The families of emotions act as waves and create a ripple effect to our moods that can develop our temperaments throughout the day (Goleman, 1995). Goleman (1995) suggests that emotions behave as a map to direct our behavior and assists in determining how individuals handle recurring challenges (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence focuses on the abilities of motivation, persistence to keep moods under control, and to empathize (Goleman, 1995). With a greater emotional intelligence, the individual is able to master relationships and handle unforeseen challenges to promote productivity. Several emotional intelligences are verbal alacrity, mathematical-logical alacrity, spatial capacity, kinesthetic knowledge, musical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and

intrapyschic capacity (Goleman, 1995). The multiple intelligences of individuals allow for diverse classrooms.

Five domains within emotional intelligence that are important for the adolescent learner include knowing one's emotion, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships (Goleman, 1995). Having emotional awareness involves the ability to recognize emotions, understand what causes those feelings, and recognize the differences between feelings and actions (Goleman, 1995). Managing emotions develops individuals who are better with anger management, have fewer verbal or physical disruptions, are able to express anger appropriately, are less aggressive or have less self-destructive behavior, are more polite and better at handling stress, and are less lonely and socially anxious (Goleman, 1995). With the ability to manage emotions, individuals have the base of self-respect and awareness of situations. Empathy involves being able to take the perspective of others, having sensitivity to the feelings of others, and becoming an actively involved listener (Goleman, 1995). Handling relationships promote the increased ability to analyze and understand relationships, increased ability to resolve conflicts, problems, and ability of negotiation, becoming assertive and using those skills within communication, desire to be outgoing and involved with peers, and more concerned, considerate, and cooperative (Goleman, 1995). The high emotional literacy of an individual improves academic achievement, social encounters, business relationships, and personal dealings.

Gained from a number of strategies and concepts, emotional intelligences are positive opportunities for self-improvement and positive relationships. When faced with obstacles that inhibit effective communication, positive health, or healthy relationships, the direct and intentional practice of the above strategies or concepts can reduce the negative influence of obstacles. Increasing the positive aspects of emotional intelligence will prompt and promote the positive improvements of social intelligence.

Social Intelligence

Social intelligence is a two-part concept that includes social awareness and social facility. Social awareness includes rationalization beginning with primal empathy, the sensing of nonverbal emotions; attunement, listening completely; empathetic accuracy, understanding another's feelings, thoughts, and intentions; and social cognition, knowing how social worlds function (Goleman, 2006). Social facility builds on social awareness to create meaningful interactions. According to Goleman (2006), social facility begins in the low road and transverses through to the high road with synchrony and the interaction with others nonverbally; self-presentation and presenting the self honestly and sincerely; influence and the ability to influence the outcomes of interactions; and concern, compassion felt, and the actions we take to help others.

According to Goleman (2006) factors in maintaining high, cognitive, and active involvement are the emotions of the leader. The security each individual feels under the supervisor promotes their ability to work, achieve goals, and overcome challenges (Goleman, 2006). Those who feel as if their leader values them are able to take criticism well and to improve based on the suggested feedback (Goleman, 2006). On the other hand, individuals with toxic leaders are fearful, anxious, and are not able to take criticism well. The emotional well-being of the leader has a correlation to the effectiveness of the classroom. The role the valuable leader perpetuates allows subordinates to feel connected. The connected feeling, based on the links people share across emotional spectrums, creates a secure base for the employee or

subordinate and the boss or leader (Goleman, 2006). The security enhances performance, increases comfort levels, and promotes the desire to want to do more for the benefit of others, the company, or self.

School Manifestations

Understanding social and emotional intelligences, self-efficacy, and identity aid in developing the whole child. School manifestations are present in daily classroom instruction and leadership. Developing the whole child involves expectations, school-based interventions, foundations, and building on foundations.

Expectations

Expectations are a triggering factor of perseverance and resiliency. The expectations others have for us can transpire to expectations that we gain for ourselves. Students begin to question the meaning, relevance, and purpose of their tasks. Students then begin to question the purpose of the instructor and any biases the instructor may have of their students.

Motivational performance feedback is a revealing component of teacher expectations to students. Beyond the sticker and generic messages that come from case overload, motivational performance feedback equips the student for self-assessments and resiliency. Attempting motivational performance feedback, students know the importance of their tasks, increase in their knowledge gained, and are prepared for future tasks (Gueldner & Merrell, 2011). Teachers provision of motivational performance feedback attempts to deliver to students the positive feedback and expectations that are vital for students to thrive in the classroom. Without the motivational performance feedback, students may lose individuality in the classroom, and may become reclusive, further decreasing their resiliency and social-emotional intelligence.

Expectations and accountability assists in the development of responsible learners. Responsible learners are developed by doing their own thinking for intentional choices and accepting consequences, both positive and negative (Wieserma & Licklider, 2008). Components that promote high expectations and accountability of students are open-ended questions and tasks, students being held accountable consistently, and meaningful and real-world tasks that create and develop experiences and interactions (Wieserma & Licklider, 2008). Effective classroom learning environments hold the beliefs and assumptions that learning happens in the individuals mind, each individual contributes to the others' learning, individuals are responsible for personal learning, learning takes place due to social interaction, metacognition is vital for constructing meaning, and that a safe environment enhances learning (Wieserma & Licklider, 2008). There are several levels of expectations (Wieserma & Licklider, 2008). The original stage involves students doing as instructed, followed by students reluctantly applying concepts to old and new ideas (Wieserma & Licklider, 2008). The final stage of students meeting their high expectations is their ability to surpass others' expectations and their productivity (Wieserma & Licklider, 2008). Students interacting with others, recording thoughts in a journal, completing meaningful projects, and self-assessment assist in the attainment and retention of high expectations and accountability (Wieserma & Licklider, 2008).

Developing high expectations in students correlates with creating and maintaining positive student-teacher relationships. Several school contextual influences affect teacher trust in the school such as teachers' behaviors, standards, attitudes and beliefs, teachers' perceptions, and teacher-student interactions (Van Meale & Van Houtte, 2011). Organizational school context assists in increasing student-teacher relationships and trust. Gender, socio-economic status,

school sector, school size, and ethnic composition are factors for trustful student-teacher relationships. Majority female schools, high socioeconomic status, the private school sector, small schools, and racial-ethnic similarities increase the trust within student-teacher relationships (Van Meale & Van Houtte, 2011). The major factor that decreases trust within student-teacher relationship is socioeconomic status (Van Meale & Van Houtte, 2011). The assumption is that those with low socioeconomic statuses are unable to develop and maintain secure foundations in the classroom environment due to their unsecured foundation at home. Without the high expectations of students through student-teacher relationships, students may begin to feel alienated which will develop into educational problems. In addition, students develop low social integration skills that can promote reduced positive outcomes, and students lack the perception of teacher support resulting in lack of engagement (Van Meale & Van Houtte, 2011). To improve upon student-teacher relationships, teachers and students should view each other with similar perspectives of school-appropriate behaviors, cognitive-motivational behaviors, and personal-social behaviors (Van Meale & Van Houtte, 2011). With the knowledge of student and teacher perceptions, developing a trustful student-teacher relationship assists in maintaining high expectations of students and students achieving the goals based on the high expectations.

Several factors are important to students achieving high academic standards. Those factors include career preparation, parental support, and teacher support. Career preparation provides the student with opportunities to experience personal career goals within the school environment (Perry & Pabian, 2009). Parental support is the expectations of how parents contribute to student success with students perceiving the support either positive or negative based on the amount of support and the expected support (Perry & Pabian, 2009). Similarly, teacher support has the possibility of negative or positive consequences based on expectations, trust, and perceived support (Perry & Pabian, 2009). The study suggests, based on diverse participants, that teacher support has the highest level of influence on student academic achievement, goal preparation, school engagement, and self-efficacy (Perry & Pabian, 2009). Increasing the amount of personalized support based on student expectations assists in students becoming socially and emotionally intelligent with a strong foundation in resiliency, identity, and autonomy.

School-Based Interventions

School-based interventions are strategies employed to assist students, families, and other stakeholders before, during, or after school. Schools incorporate interventions with a variety of strategies. Those strategies include monthly guidance sessions, extracurricular activities, parent evenings, Drop Everything And Read program, after-school programs, and before-school programs. Often school-based interventions at low-performing schools are too many and overwhelm teachers creating low school morale and high turnover (Simon & Johnson, 2013).

Middle school poses several changes to the adolescent such as biological growth, school change, cognitive growth, social development, family renegotiations, and development. In the context of the changes, academic performance and parental involvement declines. Teachers are in a limbo-like situation, deciding whether or not and how much to bring parents into their solitary home of the classroom. Involvement may lack due to several challenges parents face in a school. The school building may render itself a cause of intimidation (Hill & Tyson, 2009). In addition, students are seeking autonomy in their desire to play a larger role in their education and personal decisions (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parental involvement in school-based activities improved student academic achievement by 19% and 39% for home-based academic

socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Academic socialization accelerates student achievement due to the increased reading, outside engagement, educational experiences, and real-world application. On the other hand, home-based parental involvement does not improve student academic performance. It has been shown that parents who assist their children with homework decelerate and interfere with student achievement causing an 11% decline in student academic achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). This decline is possible due to the lack of knowledge parents have of the current standards that permeate the classroom curriculum. Overall, there are several strategies that parents are capable of implementing in school and outside of school to boost student achievement.

Social and emotional distress becomes a concern for adolescents. Developing a character development plan that is integrated into the curriculum promotes positive concepts that students are able to recognize and apply daily with morning announcements, parental involvement, posters, student pictures of success, and teacher lessons (Elias, DeFini, & Bergmann, 2010). Positively increasing students' social-emotional intelligence promotes the well-being of their academic achievement by removing stress-related factors that hinder their ability to focus and thus succeed. Social-emotional learning via character development also assists in improving students' resiliency providing several opportunities for learning from errors. Based on a school climate survey, students improved the most in peer and adult respect and enjoying the ability to share their environment (Elias et al., 2010).

Afterschool programs flourish in school districts and schools with the thinking that students will excel better in the classroom. Due to the diversity of afterschool programs, the promotion of sequenced, active, focused, and explicit programs provide students with the skill set necessary to achieve academically (Durlak, Weissbrug, & Pachan, 2010). Afterschool programs aim to accomplish positive achievement in feelings and attitudes, behavioral adjustment, and school performance (Durlak et al. 2010). Feelings and attitudes relate to the students increase of self-perceptions and bonding to the school environment (Durlak et al., 2010). Behavioral adjustments promote positive social interactions, conflict-resolution skills, and a reduction in drug use (Durlak et al., 2010). School performance incorporates achievement test scores, grades, and school attendance (Durlak et al., 2010).

Foundations

The needed foundations for students to develop into socially-emotional resilient learners include initial security, relational trust, and social-emotional intelligence. Without those three contributing factors working together, the adolescent may have difficulty with developing resiliency, engagement, and achievement inside and outside of the school environment.

Security is a fundamental necessity for everyone. Security provides the young child to the adult with a form of safety in their environment, whether known or unknown (Goleman, 2006). A secure foundation is vital to the success of the child in order to accomplish self-confidence and self-awareness. The parents create the first form of security outside of the womb with nurturing and protecting the child. In school, teachers, peers, and administrators further promote the sense of security. The healthy attachments based on security develop children and adults who become empathetic to other and knowledgeable of self (Goleman, 2006). Becoming self-aware allows the individual to become comfortable with success and failures.

Developing relational trust is a building block for developing and maintaining a secure foundation. Building trustful relationships, especially in a teacher-student relationship, involves the teachers' ability to individualize feedback given to student that is both positive and

constructive (Gueldner & Merrell, 2011). Developing a teacher-student relationship with strong trust involves the teachers' behaviors, standards, attitudes and beliefs, perceptions, and interactions with others (Van Meale & Van Houtte, 2011). Adolescents struggle in developing autonomy. As teachers, involving parents in the day-to-day activity may violate an unspoken trust agreement within the teacher-student relationship (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While developing their identity and autonomy, middle school students seek separation from their parents. The separation from parents causes the student to have a desire to seek another adult. That adult is the teacher. Teacher support has the highest level of influence than parental support or career preparation on student academic achievement, goal preparation, school engagement, and self-efficacy (Perry & Pabian, 2009). Improving our expectations of students, despite any bias an individual may have, while increasing the accountability of students should improve student achievement (de Boer & van der Werf, 2010). Student drive and motivation increases with trust and a strong foundation.

Conclusion

The application of social-emotional intelligence is aimed at developing and maintaining cognitive abilities, behaviorally stable, and affective students who are able to survive and thrive in any environment. Developing a social-emotional program prompts skills linked to cognitive development, achievement, and engagement that encourages students to become motivated and self-accountable individuals, improve teacher-student relationships, create school-family-community partnerships, and increase confidence (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Wahlberg, 2004). Developing students, schools, and communities that have respect and rapport for each other and learning requires acknowledgement and learning from mistakes, developing relationships, showing empathy, and managing emotions. Creating, enforcing, and promoting positive connections within the cognitive, behavioral, and affective environments of children, students, and adults will move secondary education to new levels of advancement for academic and technical skills and application.

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