Chapter 1
The ABCs of Social-Emotional Learning

ABSTRACT

Recent polls report a trend that school violence is steadily continuing in middle and high schools. Concurrently, schools are filled with students who cannot function academically and socially due to challenging home lives. Recognizing that social and emotional development in young adolescents is essential to academic success, educators are learning how to address these issues through social-emotional learning (SEL). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, outlines components of SEL that children and youth need to understand and manage their own emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy toward others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible life decisions. Findings note that schools that employ SEL have better academic performance as well as fewer disciplinary incidents.

INTRODUCTION

In today's global society, one of the biggest challenges for teachers of young adolescents is to educate the whole child, i.e., teaching this unique age group to learn, work, collaborate, and contribute to their fullest potential. Young adolescents can be both a delight and a challenge for middle school teachers. Effective middle school teachers have a firsthand knowledge of how young adolescents develop, how to motivate them, and how to channel the energy

and impulsivity of this age group into productive learning. The stage of young adolescence is where children, between the ages of 10 – 15, are rapidly maturing intellectually, physically, socially, morally, and emotionally. Educators of this age group understand how each of these areas of development influences learning. They recognize that it is crucial to create safe learning communities in their classrooms to help students maximize their potential in each area of development. All in all, they are responsive to their students' unique needs.

Adolescence can be both a gradual and sudden transition from being dependent to independent youth. It is this time period where adolescents explore new identities for themselves and learn how to interact with others. However, transitioning from childhood to adolescence can often be challenging for many youth. Adolescence is also the period that has the reputation for "risk taking" behaviors, such as smoking and abusing alcohol and drugs, for example. There is a continuing increase in school violence with incidents of bullying and sexual harassment, especially at the middle and secondary levels. The 2017-18 National Center for Education Statistics reported the following findings statistics on school crime:

- A higher percentage of middle schools reported that student bullying occurred at school daily or at least once a week (28 percent) than did high schools (16 percent) or primary schools (9 percent).
- Higher percentages of middle and high schools reported that cyberbullying occurred at school or away from school at least once a week (33 and 30 percent, respectively) than did primary schools (5 percent).
- Twenty-six percent of middle schools reported at least one incident of an unplanned fire alarm.
- Eighty-eight percent of middle school principals recorded violent incidents.
- In 2017, about 4 percent of students ages 12–18 reported that they had been afraid of attack or harm at school during the school year.

These at-risk behaviors, coined "middle- level phenomena" by Maurice Elias (2001) can affect the young adolescent's academic performance and behavior in and out of school and can have damaging effects on the young adolescent's socio-emotional competence.

The transition from elementary to middle school is yet another major challenge for many young adolescents. As Elias (2001) asserts: "Among the many passages students experience during their school years, few are more

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